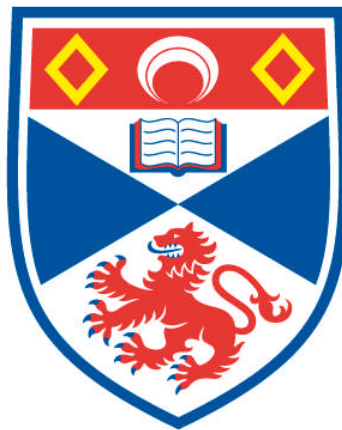


MUSEUM COMMUNICATION: LEARNING, INTERACTION AND EXPERIENCE

Jane Korsbæk Nielsen

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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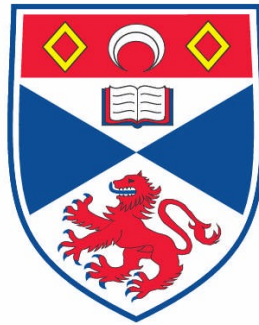
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Museum Communication: Learning, Interaction and Experience

Jane Korsbæk Nielsen



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Museum Communication: Learning, Interaction and Experience

Museum and Gallery Studies

School of Art History

University of St Andrews

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September 2014

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Abstract

Museum Communication: Learning, Interaction and Experience is a study of how museums have evolved and handled their communication approaches at both theoretical and practical levels. It discusses questions like; how has museum communication developed? What influences do these developments have on museology and its related disciplines? How will museum communication develop in the future? These are questions closely connected with essential concepts of learning, interaction, participation and experience, which will be discussed throughout the thesis. Learning and exhibition theories will be considered alongside discussions of epistemological and philosophical approaches, interpretation, and social development of museological research. The research forms a discourse analysis of museums' own views and opinions of these issues through replies of a questionnaire. It also focuses on specific case studies and examples in order to combine theoretical definitions and empirical approaches with museological developments. To form a deeper understanding of how museological communication is developing, the research includes interviews with professionals of philosophy and storytelling as well. Finally, the approaches are summarised in a new museum model developed from future studies. This model, called 'The Transformative Museum', identifies essential points in which museums have developed their communication practices and theories, and discusses how these may develop in the future. As the responsibilities of museum curators develop, museums have to embrace the concepts of transformation and flexibility too. Inquiries, research, learning and participation have to be transformed into all kinds of experiences in order to respond to changing needs and flexible structures of communities and societies. The transformative museum will have to acknowledge past traditions, current trends, and future opportunities simultaneously in order to become a museum of both present and future relevance for all kinds of visitors and users.

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Introduction

*“We think of our age
as the age of all ages
when Man has grown modern at last.
But what other page
among History’s pages
was so overburdened with past?”*

(Hein 2002: 165)

If there are organisations in the world that know what it takes to deal with the many complicated ‘pages’ of the past, it must be museums. Not just because that is essentially the purpose for which they were created, but more importantly because definitions of the past uncover important questions in the present that must be addressed as well. Scientist and poet Piet Hein had a remarkable talent for summarising complex thoughts in aphoristic poems. The world has never been as ‘modern’ and new as it is today and there has never been as much history to address before either.

This research revolves around this very issue and all the challenges and possibilities it creates for museums today. At the heart of this discussion is communication in all its various forms. Although museums have official definitions of almost everything they do - collection management, administration, exhibition design, research, etc. - communication is at the heart of everything. Yet, there has been a surprisingly sparse amount of research into the complexities of museum communication. As a result, very few museums have a direct communication strategy, policy or even definition. Often communication has been a concept solely connected to marketing, press contact or perhaps visitor interaction at the most.

The thesis sets out to explore the evolution, history and development of museum communication by addressing essential questions like: *How has museum communication developed? What influences has this development had on museums and their essential disciplines? How will museum communication develop in the future?* These questions are closely related to issues museums are well familiar with already; visitor learning, interaction and creating experiences. Although most of these involve

visitor communication, museums' internal communication is very much part of how external communication is defined and carried out as well. This thesis will explore various learning and exhibition approaches, historical and philosophical developments, museological questions, and discussions of new possibilities that museums have been facing and will be facing in the future.

Throughout the thesis, existing theories from other research fields like learning, philosophy and future studies will be introduced and presented in connection with museum studies or practices. Some are easier to implement than others, but they all contribute to new ways of thinking about museums, and encourage creativity within the field. It is important that both new theoretical approaches and new practical examples are part of the discussion. Particularly because it will introduce alternatives to what is currently practiced, and allow museums to prepare for future challenges and possibilities.

The motivation for this research springs from a long-term interest in the constant development of learning, visitor interaction and communication that takes place at museums - particularly in exhibitions and galleries. However, when both studying and working in museums, it becomes clear that the approach to communication and visitor interaction is not only very varied. Dealing with daily communication at all levels seems to be a challenge for almost every museum. The thesis seeks to encompass both empirical and theoretical approaches in order to consider the range of communication that takes place between all levels of staff, visitors and communities. Although some theoretical discussions can seem abstract and difficult to adopt in practice, it is important that practical and theoretical approaches support each other in the development of new methods and movements of communicative experiences. Many of these theoretical insights have sparked new perspectives on empirical approaches during the course of this research.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of this research are to discuss and analyse how museum communication has developed in theory and practice by looking at factors closely connected to communication, such as learning, exhibition practices and visitor interaction. The main

aims are to:

- 1) Discuss and analyse how museum communication has developed in both theory and practice.
- 2) Contribute to and hopefully broaden current museological debates on museum development and outreach.
- 3) Create a positive and significant link between current museological practices and complex theories of learning, interpretation and transformation.
- 4) Define how changing concepts in history and epistemology have formed new perspectives of approaching communicative responsibilities in learning, exhibitions and research.
- 5) Identify essential movements of the next museological phase of communication and understanding that is developing from postmodern thinking.
- 6) Act as a catalyst for future research in museum futurology, learning, visitor participation, and internal organisational structures.

In the final chapter, the thesis seeks to summarise perspectives that have influenced museum communication in historical, epistemological, practical and theoretical contexts in a new museum communication model revolving around theories of future studies and museums' own future needs and wishes. The field of futurology becomes especially relevant as many museums seek to forecast and plan for the future in their daily practices. However, as futurology has not been directly connected to museological practice or theory before, research into the benefits of planning museological futures for museums is essential.

The objectives of the thesis will approach the outlines of the aims by:

- 1) Investigating different learning and exhibition theories and analyse how they have been applied to museum practice.
- 2) Analysing and describing various case studies and linking theories directly to specific exhibition practices.
- 3) Analysing questionnaire replies through a detailed discourse analyse and seeking to broaden the views and perspectives of museum practice.
- 4) Defining core elements in current museological discussions of visitor practice, exhibition interpretation and future perspectives.

- 5) Discussing how academic as well as non-academic disciplines can open up to new understandings of approaching communication both internal and external at museums.
- 6) Introducing the discipline of futurology to form a new concise museum model of museological communication, innovation and transformation.

Definition

As will be described in Chapter 1, communication in itself holds elements of transmitting and exchanging information. However, museum communication also encompasses central concepts of learning, meaning-making and interpretation that museums are already very familiar with. It influences every aspect of how a museum approaches its work. Museum communication is therefore a process as well as a concept and will be treated as such throughout this thesis. The analyses and methods I apply throughout the thesis will therefore approach museum communication through the following definition:

Museum communication is the articulation of understandings.

Articulation is a process of formulation, transmission, transformation, interpretation and experimentation. Understanding is a concept of meaning-making, relevance, learning, experience, interaction and participation. Together, this process and concept define the core of museum work, approaches and responsibilities. The articulation of understandings applies to internal as well as external museum work. Internal and external museum communication will influence each other and constantly broaden communication practices. Whether internal or external, human beings perceive differently, respond differently and react differently to communication. This makes the formulation, transmission, interpretation and transformation process of understandings experimental. Articulation as a process will influence the outcome of understandings and will put different perspectives on how museums approach and create their learning, meaning-making and interaction. I will discuss the process and concept of museum communication through the aims and objectives of this thesis by exploring theoretical and practical approaches of the definition as well as seek to identify developments. As exhibitions have always been a central media for museum communication, there will be a specific focus on learning, interaction and interpretation in exhibitions. However, as

communication approaches develop, the focus on exhibitions is transforming as well.

Methodology and Original Contribution

The methodology of this thesis follows a qualitative approach of literature reviews, analyses of case studies chosen from different museum exhibitions around the UK, interviews and discussions on chosen subjects with researchers and directors, analysis of questionnaire answers from a chosen group of museums and my own subjective analyses and interpretations of the issues discussed. It is important to stress that the different discussions and analysis of this thesis revolve around the views of museums themselves and how they regard essential disciplines and approaches. The main empirical sources are therefore museums themselves; their approaches and views are explored in case studies, interviews and a questionnaire.

The original contribution of this research takes place on several levels: Firstly, through discourse analysis of questionnaire answers, which form a concise discussion of museums' own perspectives on communication, interaction and learning structures. In connection with this, I will attempt to form a new structure of viewing social connections of systems and organisations through the work of philosopher Michel Foucault and sociologist Niklas Luhmann. As their work has only rarely been directly connected, synthesis of their theories form a new way of looking at social structures of communication within museums.

Secondly, through interviews with professionals that are not directly connected to museum research or practice, the research explores different perspectives on how museum communication, learning and experience have developed and changed, whilst responding to different academic, theoretical and practical disciplines closely connected to museum evolution, history and communication. These interviews are also meant to contribute to the ongoing museological discussions on museum communication and visitor involvement by providing new perspectives on historical, epistemological and practical approaches.

Finally, the thesis considers theories on futurology to form a new museum communication model based on historical, epistemological, philosophical, social, sociological and practical discussions of museum communication, interaction and

experience. This model is meant to summarise the challenges that museums face today, present an overview of the evolution of museum communication, as well as prepare museums for future opportunities in their communication practices.

Structure

The thesis is divided into six chapters with museum communication at the core:

Chapter 1: Museum Communication and Learning Theories

Chapter 2: Museum Communication, History and Philosophy

Chapter 3: Museum Communication and Exhibition Practice

Chapter 4: Museum Communication and Museological Development

Chapter 5: Museum Communication and the Future

Chapter 6: The Transformative Museum

Each chapter holds an element of 1) literature review or literary discussions, 2) empirical analyses, studies or interviews and 3) subjective analyses, discussions or interpretations. Chapter 1, 3 and 5 follow the same structure with three sections each discussing:

- 1) Theoretical perspectives and literature reviews
- 2) Case Studies
- 3) Questionnaire Analysis

Chapter 2 and 4 are meant to be discussions including interviews debating alternative perspectives on museological issues. They include two sections each with Chapter 2 discussing philosophical and epistemological perspectives of museum communication, interpretation and history - and Chapter 4 debating current theoretical and social developments of museum communication, interaction and storytelling. Finally, Chapter 6 presents a new museum communication model developed around theories, practices and issues discussed throughout the thesis.

Chapter 1:

Museum Communication and Learning Theories

Section 1: Learning and Communication Theories

Introduction:

Museums - Communication, Interaction and the Making of Meaning

“Museum” ... “most accurately is the place where the Muses dwell” (Findlen 2004: 23).

Museums and their collections have always had an engaging effect on most people. Since the first collections were opened to the public and transformed into places in which research and knowledge were created and interpreted, these places have been regarded as the caretakers of classical knowledge. Although the role of museums has changed immensely since their beginnings, many still see them as places where people can go to create meaning in the present by gaining new knowledge of the past. Museums are, in many ways, still collectors of knowledge, but they are also very much interpreters and communicators of that knowledge. These last two roles in particular have become more dominant than ever. This might not be strange when one considers that museums are ever changing dynamic places that are both challenged and inspired by the society that surrounds them. This also makes them very interesting places to study. However, to study a museum demands new thinking, creativity and interdisciplinary research.

Questions on how knowledge - both new and old - can be presented and communicated to visitors within museum spaces are studied, researched and discussed more than ever. Different types of audiences require different learning, meaning-making and entertainment environments. Therefore, it has become one of the greatest tasks of today's museums to create such environments. Today, many museums dedicate a lot of space to learning and communication facilities, as well as employing teachers, educators, and learning and access managers to develop their communication, learning and meaning-making strategies. These strategies or policies might apply to a specific museum or a certain type of museum. However, at the most basic level all of these strategies are shaped by the ways in which the museum interacts with visitors, as well as

the community that surrounds them.

This has resulted in many visitor surveys and questionnaires on visitors' response to exhibitions and learning over the past few decades. Museums are curious about how 'their' visitors use the museum, and how they respond to it. Although useful and relevant to a specific museum's communication and learning strategies, these surveys rarely tell much about how or what exactly it is museums are meant to or want to communicate. If a museum wants to enhance visitor interaction and experience it might change elements of an exhibition or develop more visitor focused learning programmes. Visitor surveys often create a very short-term perspective on communication or learning. Although useful, they do not necessarily say much about what it is a museum wants to communicate or how it actually views communication as part of its policies (Black 2005; Cote and Viel 1995; Cunningham 2004; Hein 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 1994).

Museums are very complex places, and as a result, museums are immensely varied. Their organisational form can be adapted to suit very specific local communities or can sometimes speak for an entire nation. Communication, learning and visitor interaction will therefore be just as varied. Consequently, defining communication itself is very difficult. However, certain tendencies within communication practice can be identified by taking a closer historical look at how communication has evolved within museums and how museums have adapted various learning styles during the last decades (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; 1994: 3-27).

This chapter will take a closer look at how the concept of communication has been defined and discussed both within and outside of museum spaces during the last several decades. Although many communication theories seem to develop from the same sources, the use of the term in relation to museums is quite varied; a fact reflected in the many attempts to shape new communication theories especially tailored for museums. Through many of these theories it becomes possible to observe how knowledge is shaped and communicated information is adapted - on both a theoretical and empirical level. The chapter will include observations from museums that have

incorporated some of these terms and definitions into their daily communication work. These observations form the essential perspectives on how communication has and continues to develop.

This chapter will also address the development of some of the key museum learning theories and take a closer look at how learning as a concept seems to take over from education at museums. The chapter will also seek to establish how learning theories may have been put into practice by taking a closer look at two different museum exhibitions, which are used as case studies to determine the use of communication and learning tendencies within the exhibition space. Finally, the chapter will cover museums' own perspectives on learning and communication through analysis of data taken from a questionnaire presented to a diverse range of British museums.

Defining Museum Communication

Communication has in itself become a relatively common phrase. In the twenty-first century it covers everything from traditional classroom learning, storytelling, living history and marketing to social and virtual media. However, the key to understanding museum communication is to identify the complex contexts within which it is and has been used and developed. This also involves taking a look at the relevance and purpose of the museum itself.

One of the main subjects discussed when dealing with museum communication is visitor interaction; visitors demand and require change in order to keep pace with the communities in which they live. One of the major issues discussed within museums is, therefore, whether museum communication and learning should change according to visitor demands or if museums should develop and form new audiences according to their exhibition themes and collections.

Unsurprisingly, we probably have to find the answer somewhere in between these two statements. Daily communication within museums can be a very fickle term. However, one thing that seems clear is that museum communication is stretching into all aspects of museum practice, be it internal staff meetings, web developments, marketing, management, museum learning and education, exhibition planning and

creation, and visitor interaction.

It is possible to undertake comprehensive research about each of these areas alone. However, they are all defined by one very important aspect; how the museum itself regards, manages and develops its own communication. This again will depend upon how adaptable the museum has been to change and indeed how it has chosen to develop from its own history as a collector to an interpreter. (Alexander and Alexander 1996; Black 2005; Golding 1999; 2009; Harris 1995; McLean 1997).

The following section will look at how communication has developed as a useful concept within museums and how it has been used to base both theoretical terms and the practice of museum learning. This also involves focusing on how museums regard and manage their own role as communicators today and how this role has transformed throughout their existence.

Communication Theories

Firstly, it is worth defining what exactly *communication* means in this context. Director of Communication Networks, Uma Narula, begins with a fairly simple definition:

“Communication is interaction with ourselves, with others and with our external and internal environments” (Narula 2006: 2). This might seem logical - however, this definition also states that *interaction* is part of what defines communication.

Specialist in communication skills, Alan Barker, defines communication in more basic terms: *“Communication is the act of transmitting and receiving information”* (Barker 2010: 1). With the addition of the word *transmitting* we can also think of communication as a technical process. This association is not wrong according to Barker since the word communication in the nineteenth century referred to the movement of goods, people and information (Barker 2010: 1-2).

Communication is one of the primary functions of museums, and apart from the aforementioned mentioned terms, it relates closely to the other main functions of museum practice like collection, management and conservation. However, as a direct term communication seems to deal mainly with understanding.

There are various terms used to define museum communication. Often, communication collides with other terms like ‘interpretation’ or ‘meaning-making’. It actually seems to be difficult to view communication within museums without connecting it to these terms. Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, very much sees it as part of the meaning-making process: *“The process of meaning-making is the process of making sense of experience, of explaining or interpreting the world to ourselves and others” ... “The making of meaning, the construction of understanding, is reached through the process of interpretation”* (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 12). She states that the process of interpretation will involve prior knowledge, and prior knowledge is very much socially and culturally based (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 13).

Interpretation is often linked to the process of planning and creating actual settings or venues for understandings. This makes the process of interpretation very practical as it is meant to lead directly to meaning-making. Interpretation as a term is therefore mainly defined as the action of explaining meaning or making sense of something (Beck and Cable 2002; Black 2005: 211-212; Veverka 2011a). Interpretation can be both informative and provocative - some would say that it requires a provocative broadening of personal perspectives and values to learn and to get a sense of inspiration in interpretive understandings. This is an important part of the definition of museum communication, as defined in the Introduction. This does not only describe the process of interpretation as experimental but also defines the process by which visitors and museum professionals perceive understandings (Brochu 2013; Veverka 2011b).

Hermeneutics concentrates mainly on interpretive strategies, especially visitors’ experiences within museums and how they make sense of an exhibition’s theme. This approach relies heavily on the objects displayed and on media forms used within exhibitions. However, many exhibitions are still created without much thought given to the target audience. The concept of communication can therefore be understood (and indeed misunderstood) very differently (Barker 2010; Bradburne 1998; Gardamer 1976; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; 1994; Macdonald 1992; Narula 2006; Watson 2007).

The processes we undertake when we, for example, examine an object in an exhibition are illustrated by the discussions of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle allows us to understand interpretation as a circular process. We view the whole in terms of details, and the details in terms of the whole. The concept of the hermeneutic circle was originally developed by Heidegger, but philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer developed the concept further by reconceptualising the hermeneutic circle as an iterative process through which a new understanding of a whole is developed through exploration of detail (Gadamer 1976). Gadamer believed that the movement of understanding was shaped by the movement of tradition. Hence, making meaning becomes a dialogue between parts (or details) and whole, and also between past and present. Interpretation is an infinite process and is constantly revised by new ideas (Gadamer 1976: 18-43; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 12-14).

This definition can help to extend communication thinking to experience. Rather than simply looking at processes or trying to identify which processes take place within museums, hermeneutics conceptualise the meaning-making process as follows: “*The hermeneutic circle is never fully closed, but remains open to the possibilities of change*” (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 13).

The Transmission Approach

The two main theoretical approaches to understanding processes of communication have been the transmission approach and the cultural approach. These two models evolve around the aforementioned definitions and they can help visualise the communication process.

The transmission approach, which views communication as an information process, is probably the most common communication model (Shannon and Weaver 1949). This approach is concerned with sending information from one party to another. The transmission approach was developed from a desire to improve the effectiveness of mass communication and views the communication process as a learner/teacher communication strategy (Shannon and Weaver 1949; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 15-19). Although it varies in style, the transmission approach is often described through this

very simple figure:



Figure 1: The simple form of the Transmission Model

In this model, communication is understood as a functional linear process in which information is transmitted from an objective, knowledgeable communicator to a passive receiver. From stimulus created by the communicator there might be a response from the receiver. However, communication is typically seen as a one-way process, and social and cultural implications are not considered.

This model is informed by a behaviourist view of thinking where the teacher provides information that the learner absorbs. Learners are seen as passive; their knowledge is not recognised, whereas the teacher is authoritative and knowledgeable. Knowledge is understood as a body of facts, it is external to the knower and therefore capable of transfer from teacher to learner. Finally, knowledge is viewed as being static - there is a 'correct version' that can be transmitted.

Behaviourism assumes that a learner is essentially passive, responding only to environmental stimuli. The learner starts off as a 'blank slate' and behaviour is shaped through positive or negative reinforcement. In psychological learning, behaviourism is based on a number of underlying assumptions. Firstly, behaviourism is primarily concerned with observable behaviour, as opposed to non-observable events like thoughts and emotions. Secondly, behaviourists believe that a person's environment determines their behaviour, but not their will. Behaviour is thus the result of stimulus or response (Hein 1994: 74-75; 1998: 82-84).

Behaviourism is often viewed as an attitude more than a psychological theory. This is mostly due to the fact that within behaviourism, psychology is seen as the science of behaviour, not the science of mind. Behaviour can therefore be described and explained without making any references to mental activity or to internal psychological

processes. The sources of behaviour are external and in the environment, rather than internal or existing within the mind. Knowledge is transferred through the environment from teacher to learner (Hein 1994: 74-75; 1998: 82-84). This understanding of knowledge is important in terms of museum communication as it has been the main approach to communication within museum exhibitions for most of their existence.

The Cultural Approach

The cultural approach takes a radically different view of communication. Based on the constructivist paradigm, this approach understands communication as a vast series of processes through which information and meaning are created and produced. Through the cultural approach reality is formed and shaped through negotiation and discussions - it becomes part of our culture: "*Communication is cultural to the core, and culture is impossible without communication*" (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 16). Communication within this model is understood as a process of sharing and participation. It binds groups and societies together within specific cultures and social structures. Hooper-Greenhill argues that it is within these groups that communication is made meaningful and meaning-makers become active (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 17). Within the cultural approach, communication is understood as a constant process of negotiating meaning where learners actively construct their own knowledge. Learners are viewed as being differentiated and are active in the meaning-making process. The focus is on the *processes* of learning. The teacher provides empowering learning environments, but is also taking part in the learning process. The learner's prior knowledge and experiences are acknowledged too.

Defining the Intangible

The ways in which meaning is created and understood is very different within these two models. In the cultural approach meaning is achieved through discussions, participation and communication. Everyone involved must work together as part of the communication process. In museums this means having dialogues and viewing communication as a two-way process. The advantage of this model is undoubtedly an active participation, where meaning is created through social and cultural processes. A weakness of this approach might be that social processes are not always equal, which

may have an influence on communication. In the transmission approach the source of meaning becomes the source of information. The receiver is passive and therefore meaning-making is limited to the communicator who will not necessarily know if the receiver will have found the information meaningful or how the receiver may use the information (Barker 2010; Bradburne 1998; Dean 1994; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 15-19; Narula: 1-23).

In many ways, the transmission approach reflects how museums have communicated with visitors throughout most of their existence. Museums have acted as the knowledgeable interpreter and visitors were passive receivers. This model also reflects a stereotype that many museums want to put behind them and instead embrace the participatory model we see in the cultural approach. These two models enable us to understand some of the core concepts of communication and how these have evolved. They also provide us with methods of analysing how museums approach their current and potential audiences, and more importantly, provide us with a look into how museums have viewed their own communication throughout the years.

It is possible to see this change in thinking directly in the definition of museums made by The International Council of Museums (ICOM). The two following official definitions are from 2001 and 2007 respectively, and although they look similar, changes are highlighted in bold text:

The International Council of Museums' definition, 2001:

*“A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, **material evidence of people and their environment**” (ICOM: website).*

The International Council of Museums' definition, 2007:

*“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits **the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity** and its environment for*

the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM: website).

Although ICOM state on their website that: *“The definition of a museum has evolved, in line with developments in society. Since its creation in 1946, ICOM updates this definition in accordance with the realities of the global museum community”* (ICOM: website) it is still interesting to note that the changes between 2001 and 2007 revolve around *“material evidence of people and their environment”* and *“the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity”*.

Not only have museum definitions in general shifted from being functional to being about the purpose of the institution, in ICOMs definition it has also added *intangible heritage* to the core function of a museum.

This opens up a whole new interactive and dialogue-based communication form. Whereas, in the past, museums focused solely on artefacts, museums should now also focus on what cannot actually be seen. This means opening up discussions about those aspects of history or culture that we do not know much about, and letting visitors take part in the interpretation process. According to ICOM’s definition, a museum has to consider both the tangible and intangible heritage in all aspects of its work no matter if it acquires, conserves, researches, communicates or exhibits.

Museums will naturally define these elements differently depending on their specific contexts and circumstances. Therefore, it is often possible to see how current political or social trends are reflected in museum definitions and policies, as well as trace how these trends have developed over time. Nevertheless, between 2001 and 2007 the most dramatic change in the definition of museums is from *“material evidence of people”* to *“tangible and intangible heritage”*.

We also see changes in the definition of communication. From the transmission approach and the cultural approach, Barker has defined some of the core elements related to the concept of communication. Firstly, communication is continuous and it is complicated. Communication has to be continuous in order for it to be effective and whatever it is that we understand has to be communicated through our voices, music,

words, dance, media, etc. making the process very complicated. Secondly, communication is contextual; i.e. it never happens in isolation. Barker has identified five different contexts that affect communication:

- 1) **Psychological:** Relating to your needs, desires, values and beliefs.
- 2) **Relational:** Relating to how we define and relate to each other and how we behave amongst each other.
- 3) **Situational:** Relating to the social context within which we are communicating.
- 4) **Environmental:** Relating to the physical location, surroundings, furniture, temperature, season, time of day, etc.
- 5) **Cultural:** Relating to cultural norms, national, ethnic and organisational conventions that evolve around all of the learned rules and behaviours that affect our communication (Barker 2010: 10-11).

Barker believed that these five insights offered a different approach to the communication process; they all relate to each other and put the communicators in centre of the process (Barker 2010: 10-11).

Returning to the idea of communication as part of a meaning-making and interpretation process, it can be useful to look at the work of literary critic Stanley Fish. Fish introduced a method for conceptualising social and communal aspects of meaning-making through the idea of interpretive communities. Interpretative communities are made up of individuals who share strategies of interpretation and meaning-making. Fish recognised the importance of prior knowledge through which meanings are created:

“Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around” (Fish 1980: 14).

Fish regarded the meaning created from texts as a product of interpretation, rather than the focus of interpretation. The focus of meaning-making is therefore not on the text but rather on an individual experience, in which specific elements of a text are considered significant through personal experience, social influences and tradition.

If we regard the cultural approach in this context, it becomes easy to recognise

the understanding of interpretation and meaning-making. Interpretation becomes a dialogue and a convergence of intended meanings. We modify meanings according to our prior knowledge and experiences and we relate to ourselves in order to develop from our experiences (Fish 1980: 1-17; Hooper-Greenhill 2007a). The cultural approach recognises communication as a wide series of social processes through which meaning is not only produced but also transformed and used. Interpretation and meaning-making become a process of ever-changing negotiation which requires individuals to rely on their prior experiences to actively create their own meanings within a structure of interpretive communities. This definition states that communication is part of culture and culture is impossible without communication. If communication is indeed viewed as cultural, then the understanding of how meaning is created has to focus on the process of learning and not the process of teaching. For museums, this has also meant a shift from focusing on more formal education towards individual learning.

A few Examples

A few examples demonstrate how changes in communication and learning have been put into practice.

In 1997, Director of Learning at the Victoria & Albert Museum, David Anderson, published *A Common Wealth: Museums and Learning in the United Kingdom* (Anderson 1997). The report had a major influence on professional interest in the significance of education and learning in museums and galleries. The idea of the report was to review current activities of museums as centres for formal and informal learning, and also to identify how these activities could be further developed. The report was regarded as a major contribution in the UK to the study of the educational role of the museum, and it helped to set the agenda for future learning at museums. However, it also shocked many professionals to find that, for a number of museums, learning and education were a low priority. According to Hooper-Greenhill this is because many of the museums surveyed were small museums with few resources. Therefore, education is not valued at the same level as other concerns (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: xiii). This claim is backed by Anderson's report, which argued that learning and education require more resources and a higher profile within museums. Since its publication, many of the initiatives in the report have been adopted by museums, and have also helped to raise

the profile of museum learning (Anderson 1997).

Another example of how changes in museum communication and learning have been put into practice comes from *Inspiring Learning for all*. In November 2001, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (which existed until May 2012: website) developed a new learning standard for the sector called “*Inspiring Learning for all - a framework for access and learning in museums, archives and libraries*”. In 2004, *Inspiring Learning for all* was launched as an online toolkit, or rather a self-help tool to enable museums to develop their learning strategies (GLO: website).

The *Inspiring Learning for all* programme was an important step towards a more learning-focused museum sector. The focus of the programme is on users and visitors and not the organisations or institutions themselves:

- *Learning is a process of active engagement with experience*
- *It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world*
- *It may involve the development or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, values, ideas and feelings*
- *Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more.*

To be a learning organisation, a museum library or archive should develop and encourage:

- *Shared vision of its role and purpose*
- *Initiative, team work and flexible approaches*
- *Personal and professional development*
- *Openness to new ideas and approaches.”* (GLO: website).

By using this programme, museums are encouraged to review their policies and plans to engage more closely with the learning experiences of users, make users the centre of attention in learning processes and create better learning facilities. However, it is also an attempt to make these principles more ‘measurable’.

The Research Centre for Museum and Galleries in the Department of Museum

Studies at the University of Leicester was commissioned by MLA to develop methods of measuring evidence of learning in museums during 2002 and 2003. This work resulted in a conceptual framework of Generic Learning Outcomes (GLO).

It identifies the five GLOs as:

1. **Knowledge and understanding** (e.g. knowing what something is or about something, learning facts or information, making sense of something, deepening understanding)
2. **Skills** (e.g. knowing how to do something, being able to do new things, intellectual, social, communication and physical skills)
3. **Attitudes and values** (e.g. feelings, perceptions, empathy, increased capacity for tolerance, increased motivation, opinions and attitudes towards ourselves and other people).
4. **Enjoyment, inspiration and creativity** (e.g. having fun, being surprised, creativity, being inspired, innovative thoughts)
5. **Activity, behaviour and progression** (e.g. what people do, what they intend to do and what they have done, reported or observed actions, a change in the way people manage their lives). (GLO: website).

The GLOs are able to reflect a wide range of learning in museums and can be used in all aspects of research and evaluation. Since museums are often asked to demonstrate their cultural and social value and to provide evidence of their learning impact on visitors, the GLOs became an important measuring framework (GLO: website).

Communication as a Process

Exhibitions have always been viewed as the main communication space for museums. Traditionally, exhibitions approached communication as a one-way street, however, communication within the exhibition space has now evolved into something that is very complex and changeable. The communication process has developed from a very simple model to a flexible discussion between museums and their audiences. One might argue that the linear communication models, like the transmission model, are not describing

the actual process but rather a simple communication act, whereas the cultural approach considers the process and to some degree the outcome as well (Narula 2006: 11-23; Scott 2002). Although there are a number of communication models available to describe the various types of communication processes, all of which have different core definitions, they all more or less revolve around the concepts of either the transmission approach or the cultural approach (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 30-43). Some of them operate with the concept of *noise* as well and others with concepts of feedback or response (Greenberg 2005; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 30-40; Narula 2006: 11-23).

When dealing with communication within museums another *medium* has to be considered in the communication process: Objects or artefacts. It is mainly through objects, artefacts, artworks, etc. that museums communicate. It is often discussed (and has been discussed for decades) whether objects are actually the most important aspect of museum communication or if they are simply one form of communication. The focus on objects brings us back to the exhibition as the central medium for museums: Exhibitions and displays continue to be the primary means through which objects are displayed and stories are told, and it is often here that the meaning-making process begins. Although the exhibition as a medium will vary with different types of museums, the linear communication approach has undoubtedly been the most commonly used approach within museums. Museum curators were the active storytellers and interpreters of past and present cultures, and visitors the passive receivers of knowledge. For a long time museums did not consider how visitors might react to the messages they received in the exhibitions. Similarly, individual or social factors were not addressed; these included visitors' backgrounds, levels of knowledge, cultural assumptions or the intentions of the visitors to the museum.

In the 1980s, Roger S. Miles described museums that used the linear communication approach as “*disabling institutions*” (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 37; Miles 1985: 31-33). Miles pointed out that this linear understanding of the communication process was mirrored in the process of exhibition making. The model is based on people working independently at the museum, perhaps even in different departments as curators, designers, educators, etc. There would be very little teamwork, and change within the exhibition would be very difficult. This meant that curators defined the content and themes of the exhibition according to their own point of view (Anderson

2005; Chen, Ho and Ho 2006; Clifford 1988; Fleming 2002; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; 1995; 2007b; Miles 1985; Miles and Zavala 1994).

Miles did propose a different approach to exhibition creation, which proved much more flexible and involved extensive research from the early phases of exhibition planning. Miles also included revision of long-term plans, reviews of all stages of the planning process from writing literature to educational activities and an evaluation process (Chen, Ho and Ho 2006: 5-6; Corbishley et al. 2004; Fopp 1997; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 36-40; Miles 1985). This approach created a more complex and reflexive system that considers different activities as well as the actual exhibition, and whilst also allowing space for these various activities to interact. Although Miles' proposal was innovative most museums continued to use the linear approach.

It is important to consider other means of communication beyond the exhibitions themselves. Exhibitions are still the most important communication medium for museums. However, as new technological media and virtual interaction develop, many museums have embraced these new media as part of their communication (Hodge 2011). Here we also have to add activities, events and educational programmes which are generally designed to match the needs of a particular audience. Additionally, talks, lectures, tours, films, concerts, collections tours, shops and cafes or restaurants etc. are part of how museums interact with visitors. A vast range of visitor interaction approaches can be seen both inside and outside museums in the twenty-first century. Many museums use a variety of means to communicate with visitors outside the museum building; these might include connections with local or national media and local communities.

Communication can be considered from a number of different perspectives. It affects all activities of a museum and often the success of an activity depends upon its ability to be successfully communicated. Communication within the museum space is a social, as well as a cultural process. It is connected to interaction and meaning-making more than anything else. However, it is also a changeable and complex term used to describe almost all aspects of museum practice.

The Museum as a Communicative System

The process of communication is also determined by how museums view their own relevance and how they respond to social and cultural changes within their communities. As active communicators and interpreters of past and present cultures, museums must also relate to the socially constructed processes that constantly affect their own communication. It is therefore worth having a look at how these social processes are constructed and how communication develops within them.

Communicative and Social Systems

One of the dominant theories of social learning is constructionist learning which is inspired by constructivist learning theory. Constructionist theory developed around the principle that learning can happen most effectively when learners are also active in the learning processes. Constructionism is therefore closely connected with experimental learning. Constructionism can be viewed as more of an educational method based on the constructivist learning theory. Among other things, constructionist learning argues that each learner constructs their own unique meaning for everything that is learned. However, constructivists do not rule out the possibility that two learners may construct exactly the same meaning for a specific concept.

Constructionism became prominent in America when sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, was first published in 1966 (Berger and Luckmann 1991). Berger and Luckmann argue that all knowledge, including the most basic common sense knowledge of everyday life, is derived from and maintained by social interactions. When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and from this understanding their common knowledge of reality is reinforced.

During the 1970s and 1980s, social constructionist theory underwent a transformation, mainly because sociologists began to engage with the work of Foucault, but also as the theoretical sciences were tried out in practice. This had a particular impact on how social mechanisms were formed and how understanding was created (Borch and Larsen 2003).

In his definitions of sociological systems theory, sociologist Niklas Luhmann argues that everything can in fact be described as systems (Borch 2011: 19-49; Luhmann 1995b: 1-2). In this definition, society does not consist of people but of a series of communicative sub-systems each performing a special function. Each system of function has a code of meaning that holds its origin in a basic value. Luhmann believed that systems communicated with society through these codes of meaning. According to Luhmann, we only have access to the physical world through observation. The moment we begin to observe something, a different setting is in operation between what we observe and what we do not observe. In other words, it is not possible to observe something without sorting out something else. The difference between the system and its surroundings is what creates identity.

Luhmann also believed that systems were characterised by being closed, self-referencing and self-creating (Luhmann 1995b: 12-58). A system will thus refer to its choices and decisions from its own understanding. This means that a system can only open up to its surroundings when it (through its own inner logic) comes across *a disturbance*. A disturbance will arise when the system encounters differences between itself and the surroundings and when the system reflects upon its own differences (Luhmann 1995b: 437-477). The surroundings will always be more complex than the system itself, and the more complex the surrounding world is, the more opportunity a system has to increase the complexity of its identity.

The difference between a system and the surrounding world is created by communication and is therefore determined by what the receiver hears and understands. This makes communication essential to all types of learning within the system. Learning then becomes about how meaning is created in different relations, both within and between organisations and the surrounding world. Through this definition, Luhmann is offering an almost complete theory; it is not possible to transfer values and knowledge from one human being to another, but it is possible to 'free' a system, let it take responsibility and create itself (Borch 2011; Borch and Larsen 2003; Luhmann 1995b). If we apply these rather complex system theories to museums, and consider the museum to be a closed self-referencing and self-creating system, it becomes clear that social constructionism can be seen as part of a postmodern movement. Within the social constructionist strand of postmodernism, the concept of social dialogue and continuous

change of views and opinions is essential. The museum can chose to remain a closed self-referencing system, but the complexity of the museum as a place of social and cultural communication and interaction can only increase when disturbances in the shape of new ideas, inputs, social and cultural changes and constant dialogue with the surrounding world take place. It requires that the museum as a system is able to reflect upon its own differences and relevance.

To approach Luhmann's theories on systems a bit further, it is useful to examine Michel Foucault's analysis of discourses in this context as well. Although Luhmann (1927-1998) and Foucault (1926-1984) lived in the same period and their work roughly revolved around many of the same theoretical principles, they only occasionally refer directly to each other's work. Actually, it is mainly during the last few decades that more all-encompassing comparisons are drawn between the two of them (Borch and Larsen 2003; Borch 2011; Luhmann 1995a).

I believe a closer comparison between Luhmann's definition of systems and Foucault's analysis of discourses can offer a new approach to understanding the museum as a communicative system. Discourse, as Foucault defined it: "*... can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation*" (Foucault 1972: 107). According to this definition, discourses are a series of statements limited by a system, but belonging only to a single system of formation. The subject is determined by the statements discussed within the system and are not influenced by external statements. Foucault directs his analysis on discourses towards 'the statement', which he defined and analysed these theories in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1972). He argues that the core of the discourse is the statement; a discourse analysis will therefore require a closer look at the relations that exist between the statements, including their transformation, place and how widely they are spread. A discursive formation is established by defining different types of statements - a sort of 'policy' on how we act within the system. Foucault thereby states that 'the statement' becomes rules that render an expression, a proposition or an act as discursively meaningful (Foucault 1972: 89-141). As rules, 'the statement' gets a very special meaning in Foucault's definition; it is the rules that give an expression or proposition

discursive meaning, not the statement in itself.

This creates a direct link to Luhmann's definition of the system as being closed and self-referencing, and it is possible to see certain shared theoretical elements between Luhmann and Foucault (Borch and Larsen 2003; Luhmann 1995b: 278-356). Discourses are structures of meaning that make it possible to determine different meaning elements. Discourses are also the result of interventions (direct or indirect) which either connect or disconnect meaning elements to or from each other. More importantly, both Luhmann and Foucault argue that an analysis can in itself provoke a suitable disturbance. Also, from a historical context it might actually be possible to observe and analyse a closed system through potential oppositional systems, particularly because they might provide a suitable balance for analytical observations (Borch and Larsen 2003; Foucault 1972; Luhmann 1995b; 1998).

These definitions become particularly interesting in terms of museum communication because they state that a museum as a system can itself create a proper disturbance and therefore both question and criticise its own relevance within society. A disturbance within a strong communicative and interpretative system, such as a museum, will undoubtedly set new standards for communication between the museum and other systems or groups of communities and society. This first and foremost involves communication and interaction with many different groups of visitors.

Learning Styles within the Museum Space

As shown in the example of the *Inspiring Learning for All* initiative, one of the most challenging tasks of today's postmodern museums is how they interact and communicate with their audiences. Throughout most of their existence, museums have regarded learning as one of their most important functions. Today most visitors expect to learn something new or gain new knowledge or meaning when entering a museum. At the same time, most visitors also expect to be entertained, often because a museum visit is part of a social activity; you visit with family, friends, colleagues, school classes, etc.

Learning in museums is no longer limited to collections but can take place everywhere and includes many types of media and learning procedures (Black 2005:

123-156; Hein 1992: website; 1998: 2-7; Russell 1994: website; Sandell 2002; 2003; 2007; Sandell and Dodd 2001; Wenger 2002: 63-64). This also means that a very clear gap between the terms *learning* and *education* is emerging. Where museums sought to *educate* at the beginning of their existence, they now seem to have adopted *learning* as one of their main postmodern responsibilities (Hein 1998: 1-13). This is due especially to the fact that learning can be done for pleasure and interest and not necessarily to obtain a formal education:

"There is still a tendency to see "education" as taught sessions for schoolchildren, and there is still a failure to acknowledge that museum education must be seen in the context of the museum or gallery as a cultural organization within a contradictory and unequal social framework" (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 3).

According to Reader in Public History and Heritage Management at Nottingham Trent University, Graham Black, it is not just important to distinguish between learning and education but also between "*lifelong learning*" and "*life wide learning*" (Black 2005: 125). He argues that, within the social inclusion environment, the focus seems to be on how museums can contribute to life wide learning by encouraging individual empowerment and development of skills. However, Black also states that it is the concept of lifelong learning that has become part of the political agenda across the western world (Black 2005: 125).

Today most museums have acknowledged that they have to communicate with many different people of different ages and from many different backgrounds; all have their own way of receiving new knowledge and of making meaning. However, learning and communication in today's postmodern museum has its roots in different theories, and many museums are already building on these theories in their communication practices. The purpose of using learning styles can be very complex, although they usually all have the same goal in common; to help visitors create meaning. Like the concept of communication, learning has been defined in many different ways: as part of education, lifelong learning, meaning-making processes, etc. Black states that:

"Learning is both a process and an outcome - the process is about how we learn" ... "The outcome is about what we gain from learning" (Black 2005: 129). The following sections will outline some of the most important and most used learning and

communication theories.

Constructivist Learning Theories

Many postmodern learning ideas have developed from constructivist learning theory. Sometimes it seems that education and learning literature in general is dominated by constructivist theory. One of the main principles of constructivist learning theory is to focus on how people learn: *"In order to make meaning of our experiences, we need to be able to connect it with what we already know"* (Hein 1994: 77). There have been many names for this set of ideas and it has had major impact on how museums today address learning and communication. Constructivism is particularly appropriate as a basis for museum learning but it requires a thorough consideration of the backgrounds of the wide range of museum visitors including: their age, prior knowledge, their expectations, etc.

Constructivist thinking begins by understanding learners and creating a space where suitable and useful learning can take place. Constructivist thinking has developed from psychologist and philosopher Jean Piaget's understanding of how we receive knowledge; no matter what you may try to teach it will always be 'read' or interpreted individually by learners. Within Piaget's thinking it becomes clear that it is not possible to shape someone's knowledge because communicated information will be adapted and re-interpreted by the learner. Piaget's approach was considered to be very different from the approach taken by behaviourists where the creation of knowledge was dependent on a teacher (Buchli 2002; Hein 1992; 1995; 1998: 155-179; Hodge and D'Souza 1994; Hooper Greenhill 1995: 37-52; Rickey 1968).

Piaget's work was followed up in America during the 1960s by psychologist Jerome Bruner who believed that by building on Piaget's theory it was possible to present any subject matter to children of any age as long as it was appropriate to their maturity level (Brunner, Wood and Ross 1976).

Bruner proposed three modes of understanding the world:

The Enactive - where representation is formed through actions. Learning takes place through doing and through using objects, people or events.

The Iconic - where interpretation involves picturing or building up mental images of

things based on experience. Objects become 'picturable' and images might summarise ideas.

The Symbolic - where representation takes place through symbols. There might not be any direct terms or languages used to identify objects - or it is possible to name the same object in different ways according to use (Bruner, Wood and Ross 1976).

This understanding of how children of different ages learn becomes useful in the understanding of how an individual might draw on all three different modes at various times during a learning process (Bruner, Wood and Ross 1976). Constructivism suggests that we construct meaning as we learn. This makes learning an active process and very often also part of a social activity. Museums generally view constructivism as a postmodern way of interacting with visitors, especially because it presents an opportunity for visitors to engage actively with exhibition themes and settings.

It is, however, not possible to adapt new knowledge without prior knowledge or experiences. George E. Hein has focused on this particular aspect of constructivist learning theory in his work, in which he argues that the crucial action of constructing meaning happens in the mind. Museums have to construct activities and challenges that engage both minds and hands. He also believes learning to be contextual, meaning that learning is a relationship between prior knowledge and what we already know and believe. When we reflect upon new knowledge, we put it into contexts we are familiar with or have experienced in the past. In this way we make learning part of our lives. Hein also states the importance of motivation in learning; motivation does not only help learning, it is essential for making meaning. Motivation helps to explain why we have to learn and it may well be the reason why we choose to get involved in a learning process in the first place (Hein 1994: 73-79; 1995; 1998: 25-39; Shanks and Hodder 1998).

Principles of Learning

Hein outlined some ideas on what he called *guiding principles* (Hein 1992: website) of constructivist thinking that must be considered by educators and teachers. He defined these principles of learning on the basis that all learning consists of individual constructed meaning - this also influences museum learning. The following nine

principles are essential to Hein's definition of individual constructed meaning. They all affect each other and influence museum learning enormously:

1. Firstly, Hein describes learning as an active process in which the learner uses sensory input to construct meaning. He states that learning is not a passive acceptance of existing knowledge, rather the learner has to engage with the subjects and the educator.

2. Hein often states that: "*people learn to learn as they learn*" (Hein 1992: website). By this he means that learning consists of both the construction of meaning and construction of systems of meaning, e.g. the methods by which we learn.

3. The construction of meaning is a mental process, i.e. it is happening in the mind. Hein believes that educators need to stimulate the mind, as well as teach through hands-on activities or physical actions.

4. Learning also involves the use of language. The language used in a learning situation influences the learning process. This does not just apply to the educator but also to the learner.

5. Learning is a social activity. How we learn is associated with how we connect with other people, with the teacher and how the people that came before us connected. Hein believes it to be of great importance that educators acknowledge this. Traditional education is often directed towards isolated learning; social learning involves conversation, interaction and cooperation as well.

6. Learning is contextual. Learning must be seen in relation to what we already know, believe and to our prejudices and fears as well. In other words, Hein does not believe that learning can be separated from life experiences.

7. Hein also believed it to be necessary to possess prior knowledge in order to learn. It is simply not possible to assimilate new knowledge without first having some knowledge of structure or prior knowledge to build on. This also means that the more we know, the

more we can learn.

8. It is also important to acknowledge that learning takes time. Ideas need to be revisited, tried out, pondered over and played with. When we experience profound insights it is therefore often the result of a long period of preparation. This becomes particularly important for museum learning; often we spend less than ten to fifteen minutes in a gallery and learning cannot happen in such a short time. We therefore reflect on what we experience in an exhibition by reflecting on what we already know.

9. Motivation is a key component in learning. Motivation does not only help to stimulate learning, it is essential for learning. In order to get involved in the learning process we have to be motivated to do so (Hein 1992: website).

Hein believes that these principles of learning are essential to museum learning. Hein emphasizes that points one and three (above) provide key factors for learning development within the museum space:

“Most museum educators have accepted the idea that learners need to be active, that in order to participate in learning we need to engage the learner in doing something, in hands-on involvement, in participatory exhibits and programs. But the more important point, I believe, is the idea that the actions which we develop for our audience engage the mind as well as the hand” (Hein 1992: website).

Hein also believes that physical involvement is necessary for children’s learning processes. It can also be highly useful for adults but it may not be sufficient. He argues that hands-on activities must also be minds-on.

Hein also believes that point two (above) to be essential within the museum space. He argues that we begin to understand organising principles as we use them. This very much applies to the museum too: *“What are we assuming about our visitors’ ability to learn (to organize knowledge) when we present exhibits to them?”* (Hein 1992: website). Knowledge is not just what an exhibit might present but also how it organises knowledge and structures it. Curators often have to assume that visitors have specific prior knowledge and also the ability to make connections between learning principles as they make their way through an exhibition.

Hein also made a connection between points four and five (above). Learning is a social activity but it also depends on how we speak, what we speak about, and very much on how we interact with other people. The language and conversations will inevitably be different if we visit an exhibition with family, friends, as part of a school group or with colleagues. Curators need to consider which elements in the exhibition will encourage visitors to discuss, talk and explore together and at the same time reflect upon their traditional role as ‘quiet spaces for reflection’.

Regarding points six and seven (above), Hein believes that visitors need to make connections in exhibitions in order to help them understand messages. It is important for museums to present different kinds of entry points, different kinds of stimuli and sensory modes to attract a wide range of visitors. Some visitors prefer reading a lot of text, others to engage in hands-on activities, etc. Prior knowledge differs immensely and museums have to recognise this. Hein believes that no other issue in constructivism raises more questions than finding the right level to engage with a learner: *“People learn as they are stretched beyond their own knowledge but only within a range that is within their grasp given what knowledge and skills they bring to a task”* (Hein 1992: website).

Finally, Hein considers points eight and nine (above) in connection to museum learning. He argues that there are specific times to learn, to reflect and to revisit ideas. Museums might find this issue a particularly challenging one, since visitors are free to come and go and if some of their visitors are tourists they might never return (Boniface 1998). Sometimes exhibitions can be revisited - if not physically then in the mind. This can also be done from home via websites, online exhibitions, etc. giving museums a powerful tool to increase the time possible for visitors to interact with exhibitions and reflect on them.

Hein concludes that these principles of learning might appeal to our postmodern views of learning and acquiring new knowledge. However, they conflict with traditional museum practices - practices that many museums still struggle to overcome. Hein believes that museums need to reflect on their practices to apply these ideas to their

work (Hein 1992: website).

Constructivist Learning

When explaining constructivist theory, Hein often reflects on the nature of theories of knowledge and theories of learning as two separate components: *“In order to consider how a museum is organised to facilitate learning, we need to address both what is to be learned and how it is to be learned”* (Hein 1995: 21). This thought depends on how we understand knowledge to exist; i.e. does knowledge exist independently of a learner or does it only exist as ideas and opinions constructed in the mind? Secondly, it is important to consider how people actually learn - or the psychology of learning (Hein 1995). Thus it is possible to believe that learning consists of assimilation of information, experiences, facts, etc. that all form and shape knowledge within the learner. This approach has a lot in common with behaviourist thinking suggesting that knowledge is acquired through a number of individual experiences. It is also believed that learning consists of how well one selects and organises knowledge, and also how language is structured within the learning approach. Hein combined these two educational approaches in a diagram that describes four possible combinations of learning theory, each representing a different approach to learning and education:

- **Traditional Lecture and Text:** In this approach, the teacher has two responsibilities. First to understand the structure of the subject and the content that is to be learned and second to define a logical order of teaching so the subject becomes as easy to learn as possible. This represents the traditional linear teaching/learning approach.
- **Discovery Learning:** In this approach learners more or less construct knowledge themselves as they build up concepts and ideas using their own personal and mental constructions. This also makes it possible to develop misconceptions. Supporters of discovery learning believe that learners need to have experience in order to learn; to do and see - and not just to be told. It is the task of the teacher to organise the subject so that it can be experienced, and not in a logical structure as in the traditional approach. This is very much a hands-on

approach and it requires that the learner independently comprehend concepts and ideas and that the teacher is capable of replacing misconceptions by correct conceptions through experience.

- **Behaviourist Learning:** Hein based this belief on the original psychological learning theory where knowledge does not necessarily exist outside the learner. Knowledge here is not based on knowledge from responses, feedback or stimuli. It is gained in a set of series and structures.
- **Constructivism:** Constructivism argues that both knowledge and the way it is obtained are dependent on the mind of the learner. It also argues that learners construct knowledge as they learn - and not just add new facts to what they know. They constantly develop and reorganise the understanding and the ability to learn, and interaction with the world is a major part of this. Knowledge constructed through this approach can be both individual and social. However, construction of knowledge is dependent on one's individual position (Hein 1995: 22).

Hein thinks that the learning and educational positions outlined here can be applied directly to museums: *"For any consideration of learning in museums, we can ask an epistemological question, What is the theory of knowledge applied to the content of the exhibitions? We also need to ask a question about learning theory, How do we believe that people learn?"* (Hein 1995: 23). Hein believed that these two components of museum theory could lead to four new positions similar to the four learning approaches, which are listed below.

In connection with the traditional approach, Hein described a type of museum called *the systematic museum* based on the belief that an exhibition should be displayed so that it describes facts through a logical structure. Hein defined *a discovery museum* based on discovery learning methods. *An orderly museum* based on behaviourism and finally *a constructivist museum*. He defines the constructivist museum as a museum with exhibitions that allow visitors to draw their own conclusions and meanings (Hein

1994; 1995; 1998). There are also museums that offer the visitor multiple possibilities through an exhibition and where a range of opportunities to acquire knowledge is provided. He argues that the logical structure of an exhibition or the way a subject is presented to visitors is not dependent on either the objects on display or the characteristics of the subject matter. Rather it depends simply on the educational needs of the visitor. A constructivist exhibition does not assume that there is just one way for visitors to learn; it lets visitors make their own connections based on their own experiences (Barnes and Bloor 1982; Hein 1994; 1995; 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 1994).

Constructivist theory argues that in any teaching or learning situation, the focus is necessarily on the learner and not on the subject matter. This assumption seems to conflict with the way that museums approached learning when they were originally created as learning institutions. However, museums are also extraordinary places for learning, according to Hein (Hein 1995: 23). Yet, he believes the museum experience to be elusive and therefore museums need to acknowledge that learning processes take place and are created in the mind of the visitor. That will be one of the key factors to maximise learning potential within the museum space. Learning is a long process, and it takes time. Some of the following learning theories have been influenced immensely by constructivist learning theory, and many postmodern museums develop their learning and communication activities around them.

Multiple Intelligences and Differentiated Learning Styles

The idea of multiple intelligences was created and developed by developmental psychologist and professor of Cognition and Education, Howard E. Gardner (Gardner 1993; 1999), who believed that there are various ways of learning and knowing. Since the 1990s Gardner has identified eight different types of intelligences:

- 1) **Linguistic:** A person with a linguistic intelligence likes to talk through problems and likes a lively debate. They focus on talking manipulation of words and meanings. They are often poets and writers.
- 2) **Musical:** A person with a musical intelligence can easily record words to songs, they respond well to a variety of sounds including environmental sounds, music

and the human voice. Perhaps they even like to compose music.

- 3) **Spatial:** A person with a spatial or visual intelligence will often notice things others miss. They have very good visual recall and will be able to remember scenes, objects or faces for many years. They like visually presented information such as charts, pictures or images. In a museum they often respond well to visually stimulating displays, to video, photography and film, and to the use of colour. They can be e.g. doctors, sculptors or navigators.
- 4) **Naturalistic:** A person with a naturalistic intelligence enjoys being outside and notices patterns and rhythms in nature. In a museum they will often appreciate an opportunity to spend time outside the buildings as part of the visit. They are often good at recognising and classifying objects.
- 5) **Logical mathematical:** A person with a logical mathematical intelligence is often a problem-solver and very good at constructing solutions non-verbally. They often see patterns and systems in the world and like information to be presented in a logical and systematic order. They are often scientists, mathematicians or accountants.
- 6) **Bodily kinaesthetic:** A person with a bodily kinaesthetic intelligence often uses physical exercise to work through problems. They learn best by doing and physical movement helps their memory. They often respond well to interactive museum exhibitions and hands-on approaches. They are often dancers, craftspeople or athletes.
- 7) **Interpersonal:** A person with an interpersonal intelligence often likes spending time with other people and is quite sensitive to their moods. They understand and work well with other people and respond quickly to changes in mood and adjust to behaviour. They are often good at giving and receiving feedback and often respond well to debates and discussions. They are often teachers or enjoy being in social learning environments.
- 8) **Intrapersonal:** A person with an intrapersonal intelligence often enjoys spending time reflecting. They are highly self-motivated and have a high degree of self-knowledge. They enjoy opportunities to develop thoughts and express these. In a museum they will often spend time alone in the exhibitions researching and thinking before they talk to others about their experiences. They

understand themselves and how to use this to negotiate with others (Gardner 1993; 1999).

According to Gardner, learning environments had mostly considered the logical mathematical and linguistic intelligences in their communication approach. These were considered especially useful in a traditional modern approach. Gardner's idea of multiple intelligences does take a more pluralistic view on the learning process. First of all, he stated that each intelligence is independent; this means that a person might hold good abilities in one or a few of these intelligences, but not necessarily in others. It is more than likely that we all possess more than one of these intelligences. Secondly, it is actually possible to develop intelligences. It is, for example, possible to develop good abilities in one of the intelligences that one feels less confident about by using another intelligence (Davis and Gardner 1994: 99-104; Gardner 1991; 1993; 1999).

The theory of multiple intelligences can tell museums a lot about their visitors and how they approach learning in exhibitions. This becomes clearer if we look at the work carried out by Bernice McCarthy and Susan M. Leflar. Based on the work of educational theorist, David A. Kolb, McCarthy and Leflar created four theoretical types of learners (McCarthy and Leflar 1983). Although intelligences develop in different ways, it is possible to observe some of them in these four types of learners:

- 1) **The Imaginative learner** who seeks meaning through his/her own experiences - especially by being personally involved in the process. An imaginative learner will often learn by listening and by sharing thoughts and ideas. This type of learner seems to use his/her interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities very much. They need to be personally involved in learning processes, learn by listening to other people, and sharing ideas and theories.
- 2) **The Analytical learner** who seeks facts by collecting data and organising it by using certain concepts. The analytical learner is someone most of us know from the traditional school classroom; they approach new information critically and they quickly adapt to expert knowledge. They have developed their linguistic, logical-mathematical and perhaps also their naturalistic sense since childhood.

- 3) **The Common-sense learner** will mostly need to know how things work in a practical sense. They enjoy hands-on experiments to test their data, and generally need a practical way of approaching knowledge. They might use different intelligences, but especially their bodily-kinaesthetic, musical and spatial intelligences. They learn by trying and testing their ideas.
- 4) **The Dynamic learner** is very flexible in his/her way of gaining new information. They adapt easily to change, and they often seek new ways of developing ideas and testing theories. Often, they do not mind taking a certain amount of risk during the process. They tend to be very experimental in their approach, and they might use different intelligences in order to gain a result. They can, however, be very spatial in their approaches, but might easily take their ideas a bit further by using their bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal or intrapersonal abilities (Black 2005: 137; Caulton 1998; Gardner 1991; 1993; 1999; Gunther 1994: 121-122; Hein 1994: 73-79; 1995: 189-203; 1998: 14-40; McCarthy and Leflar 1983).

It is important to remember that there is no straightforward way to understand learning - each type of learner has his/her own way of understanding meaning and new knowledge. Gardner brought this a bit closer to the museum world himself by using the example of an art museum. He describes what he calls "*five different windows on learning*" or different ways of engaging with a specific museum object (Davis and Gardner 1994: 101):

- 1) The *Narrational Window*; here the visitor is asked questions about a story or a theme illustrated in a particular painting.
- 2) The *Quantitative Window* provides learners with more straightforward facts about the artist or the paintings; like e.g. how many paintings the artist did, which materials were used, etc.
- 3) The *Foundational Window* is concerned with issues regarding the context of a painting; this might concern issues like how the painting relates to other

paintings in an exhibition, or why this specific painting might be considered to be a work of art.

- 4) The *Aesthetic Window* should be a rather easy approach for art museums; here the visitor is asked questions about forms or shapes of the painting, how the dimensions may or may not fit together and how one feels about the painting.
- 5) The final approach is the *Experimental Window*; this is also referred to as the hands-on approach. In an art museum visitors might get a chance to create a painting themselves or take part in various activities (Davis and Gardner 1994: 99-104).

These five windows will provide the learner with the possibility to construct his/her own meaning and may help to create an individual understanding of an artwork. Gardner and Davis believe these windows will encourage visitors to seek out relevant information to form their own perspectives and meanings. This approach to learning theory puts the learner in focus and it gives the museum the role of a catalyst of learning and meaning: *"This is in contrast to the situation in which a museum decides what the viewer needs to know and thereby dictates a preference for one way to make meaning over another"* (Davis and Gardner 1994: 101).

Physical, Social and Personal Learning

Dr John Howard Falk and Dr Lynn D. Dierking have defined three important components that might shape the learning and communication experience within museums. These are referred to as physical, social and personal learning, and they play an essential role in shaping visitors' individual learning experiences (Falk and Dierking 1992: 41-66; 2000: 15-68).

- 1) Personal learning is primarily influenced by prior knowledge, including personal interests and can be affected by personal skills as well. These elements will shape the individual experience, and might give new perspectives on prior knowledge.
- 2) Social learning concerns every social aspect of a museum visit, including people one might visit the museum with, contact with museum staff, contact with other visitors, etc. The social context can have an enormous influence on the learning

experience.

- 3) Finally, physical learning deals with issues concerning the location and environment of a museum space. It might be the buildings, exhibition rooms, landscape, etc. These elements can influence one's memory of a museum visit and also the ways in which we 'store' knowledge and create meaning (Black 2011; Falk and Dierking 1992; 2000; Fenton 1995; Golding 1999: 187-201; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 146-160; Wenger 2002: 63-64).

These three learning components will most likely have a significant effect on everything from the types of intelligences we use to learn, the different 'windows' on learning and on the approach taken by the museum to create a useful learning environment. Visitors are influenced by their own personal interests, skills and intelligences and by the components and approaches set up by the museum. Although museums may be influenced by other learning and meaning-making theories, this chapter has highlighted some of the most important and most used theories within museum spaces today. As we will see in the following sections, museums have already shaped their exhibition spaces after many of these learning theories for a while.

Section 2: Case Studies

Identifying Learning Theories in Exhibitions

Even though communication and learning theories have been inspiring museums in their exhibition creation for a while they can seem rather abstract before they are applied to a specific exhibition. The following sections will take a look at two very different exhibitions to see how they have approached and used some of these theories in their exhibitions and galleries. Many museums will naturally not have had specific learning or communication theories in mind when constructing their exhibitions. However, theoretical analysis combined with the outcome of what can actually be experienced in an exhibition can provide a distinct perspective on how visitors react to the exhibition experience and how the individual museum approaches learning and communication interaction. I have chosen two very different exhibitions: one at National Museum of Scotland and the other an exhibition at The British Golf Museum. I will go through each part of the exhibition and try to apply some of the learning theories described to what can be observed and experienced in the exhibitions. When undertaking exhibition analysis the outcome will naturally be subjective and dependent on the viewer. The following analyses are therefore based on subjective observations and it is possible for a different observer to gain another outcome. With this in mind, it can however be useful to experience how museums approach learning and interaction in a more practical sense.

Case study: National Museum of Scotland - Natural World Galleries

In 2011 National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh reopened their exhibitions after a major refurbishment. The plans for a new museum had been in progress for a number of years and in 2004 the first master plan was ready. During the following years the museum planned and carried out a 46.4 million pound refurbishment of the entire building. During the design process, the museum planners were faced with the well-known conundrum: *“In any museum there is a conflict between the architecture and the artefacts. If the building is too showy, the collections are diminished”* (Lewis and Johnson-Symington 2011: 42). The National Museum of Scotland was formed in 2006

with the merger of the Museum of Scotland and the Royal Museum next door. The buildings themselves are very distinctive, in that they join together the former Museum of Scotland, which is of modern design, and the former Royal Museum, built in the 1860s. The reason for the major refurbishment was a general need of change and modernisation. The National Museum had struggled with some out-dated displays, the collection had grown, there was little interpretation in the old exhibitions, the learning facilities were somewhat restricted and access was generally difficult. As a result, only about ten percent of visitors would actually make it to the top floors of the old museum.

According to the unpublished master plans, the goal for the refurbishment was to engage visitors with the objects from a very early stage. There would also be larger objects on display, as well as larger people-sized panels and models in the exhibitions. It would also be possible to display real objects rather than replicas.

The sixteen new galleries take up around seven thousand square metres and it is the intention to increase visitor numbers by twenty percent. Also, the museum has a new learning centre, shops, cafés and a restaurant. Added to this comes eight hundred square metres of special exhibition space. All in all, very ambitious plans divided over the building's seven floors (National Museums Scotland: website).

Natural World

In what is meant to be more or less permanent exhibition spaces, the museum has chosen to divide its new exhibitions into several themes that cover all levels of the building: *Learning and Information facilities, Scotland, Science and Technology, Art and Design, World Cultures* and the *Natural World*. Elements of these themes can be discovered at all levels of the building; if visitors want to explore the history of Scotland, for example, they will have to visit six levels of the building to find all of the displays covering this theme.

This vertical division of exhibitions might seem a little confusing. Although handed maps in the entrance hall (Image 8), observation of museum visitors has shown that it often takes some time for visitors to acclimate to this approach. Often visitors take one floor at the time and visit all the exhibitions on that floor before going to the next floor in the building. This is simply to ensure that they have been in all of the exhibitions since it can be confusing to not only find your way to the next floor but also

to carry on with the exhibition once you get there. The museum is clearly trying to address the former issue of few visitors reaching the top floors and might also seek to spread visitors to all levels of the building to create more space and accessibility.

In the exhibition theme called *Natural World*, the museum seems to have utilised visitor interaction and learning facilities more than it has in any other exhibition. *Natural World* is divided into six sub-themes covering three levels of the building, in addition to a section called *Wildlife Panorama* consisting of life-sized casts and models of animal species. This impressive panorama follows visitors in the air through all levels of the displays; models hang from the roof down to the very bottom level of the museum building, making it possible to admire the animals from every exhibition level.

Earth in Space and Animal World

The *Natural World* displays begin at level one with two adjacent displays: *Earth in Space* and *Animal World*. *Earth in Space* tells the story of the earth's history and asks questions like: "*What is out there? Where do we fit into the Universe?*" (National Museum of Scotland: website). The display is made dark and small light bulbs in the air create a feeling of looking at the stars. Large models of the earth and of historical instruments used to investigate space and the planets dominate the display. The display takes a technological approach to the questions it raises, and although the room seems small compared to the rest of the galleries it does provide a nice and somewhat quiet starting space for the *Natural World* galleries.

Right next to *Earth in Space* the *Natural World* galleries continue with *Animal World*. The large room displays life-sized animals often 'in motion' positions. It does not take much imagination to see the cheetahs chase gazelles through long grass, small crabs scuttle sideways across the sand, roaring lions and monkeys climbing the trees. Panels and touch screens tell more about the individual animals. This display seems to attract both very young children and adults. It is often possible to touch some of the animals although visitors are clearly not meant to (signs situated on large plinths next to the animals ask visitors not to). Some visitors have clearly taken interaction a bit too far which became visible when a large giraffe on the bottom floor suddenly lost its tongue - it had clearly been a bit too tempting to try and reach the giraffe from the middle floor

(Image 2 and 3). It would appear the museum has to be prepared for this kind of ‘visitor contact’ when displaying animals in this way and has to be ready for repairs along the way (Smith and Wolf 1996; Soren 2009).

It is clear that the museum intends to make these two displays ‘come alive’ to visitors from the beginning. It is impossible not to be part of the displays when walking around them. Visitors are surrounded by ‘moving’ animals everywhere; some placed above their heads, some next to them and some just next to their feet. If further information is required the visitor has to explore it for themselves on the interactive touch screens; making it obvious that interaction plays a key role in the display.



Image 1: *Animals on the move in the Animal World Gallery (Photo: Jane Nielsen, June 2012).*

If we go back to Hein’s educational diagram (Hein 1995: 22), it becomes clear that we are dealing with the concept of *discovery learning*. Visitors have to construct knowledge themselves and build up concepts and ideas using their own personal mental constructions. There is a strong hands-on element in the display where visitors have to be active in finding information and acquiring new knowledge (bearing in mind that this concept might also develop misconceptions, according to Hein). As mentioned, supporters of discovery learning believe that learners need to have experience in order

to learn. A hands-on approach requires that the learner independently comprehend concepts and ideas from the displays, but also that the museum is capable of changing misconceptions through experience.

If we look at Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, it seems like visitors with spatial, naturalistic, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and perhaps also intrapersonal skills find it easiest to approach this display. It is the sort of display that immediately takes up the entire room, which visitors must then navigate; moving around each other whilst interacting with the animals on display. This approach very much appeals to the imaginative learner who needs to be personally involved in the learning process. There is plenty of space to interact with others in the display too. Common-sense learners will also find this display interesting as they especially find hands-on activities useful. The dynamic learner has to be mentioned here as well, since walking from one display of Natural World to another requires visitors to adapt easily to changing settings and surroundings.

Using the definitions of Davis and Gardner, this display takes the approach of an Experimental Window (which is very similar to Hein's theory on Discovery Learning). The display requires of the visitor to participate and interact. Finally physical and social learning is very strong here as well; the room is physically dominated by animals so that visitors are physically surrounded from the beginning. Also, visitors and learning activities becomes a very social aspect of the display. The physical learning does seem less dominant in the *Earth in Space* section - although large instruments and globes might create a more physical learning environment towards the technology.

Many visitors will find it easier to interact with the display through social interaction, mainly because there will always be other visitors interacting with the same elements of the display as you are. The position of the animals makes it impossible to have elements of the display to yourself, however, via touch screens it becomes possible to gain new information on a more private level simply because more than one or two people cannot stand around a screen at the same time.

Personal learning gained from this display will depend on prior knowledge and the level of visitor interaction and engagement with the objects. It is possible to walk around and enjoy the sight of animals from all angles and perspectives without approaching the plinths or touch screens, which creates a strong visual experience.

However, a deeper particular knowledge about a specific animal is more difficult to acquire, partly because the touch screens do not provide such in-depth knowledge on each animal, and also because it can be difficult for visitors with intrapersonal intelligences to find the room calm enough to engage in a long-time investigation or reflection of a particular animal although they might find the animals very engaging. Learning is very much an active and social process in this particular part of the *Natural World* display; experimenting with the exhibition spaces and positions of objects (animals) becomes key to engaging visitors further.

Restless Earth and Animal Senses

On level three, the *Natural World* exhibition continues with two displays next to each other: *Restless Earth* and *Animal Senses*. They build on the same physical settings as the floor below; with a small dark space telling the story of the earth and its geological formations like mountains, volcanoes, earthquakes etc. and how they influence the earth as a planet. The display particularly focuses on rocks and fossils to tell this story. Again large interactive models of the earth are used to show text and display further information.

In the adjacent room, the stories of animals in the *Animal Senses* exhibition continue. As we are now on the third floor of the building, the display is shown around the walls of the gallery - the floor takes the shape of a large balcony. Visitors can therefore also take a look down at the *Animal World* display on the first floor. The centre space is used as part of the *Wildlife Panorama* exhibition and displays large models of animals throughout the entire height of the building.

Animal Senses revolves around the five human senses and animal super senses. It uses a more traditional glass case display to show photos and texts of animals and how they use their senses. However, there are elements of hands-on (especially at the height of children) - it is for example possible to step onto weighing scales to see how much you weigh compared to a large brown bear or to test your own reaction time compared to a predatory animal. The display is also dominated by sound effects of predators or animals communicating or signalling to each other.



Image 2 (left): *Giraffe on the bottom floor seen from the middle level in the galleries (Photo: Jane Nielsen, June 2012).*



Image 3 (right): *The same giraffe a few months later with its tongue broken off (Photo: Jane Nielsen, October 2012).*

Although there are still elements of Discovery Learning, we also see a more traditional approach in this part of the exhibition. It is possible to acquire a more in-depth knowledge on animal hunting and senses through texts and screens in the exhibition. However, visitors do not get the same sense of the smaller animals because they are displayed in cases on the wall. However, the animals in the centre of the room as part of the *Wildlife Panorama* make up for this. Visitors with linguistic and logical mathematical skills will probably find this part of the exhibition easier to navigate than the first part. The Analytical learner will definitely feel a better learning space has been created in this room, although there are still elements created for the common-sense and imaginative learner through hands-on elements and sound effects. The experimental window is here combined with the quantitative window as well, and it is also possible to

see elements of the narrational window; more straight-forward facts are mixed with hands-on elements.

Physical learning is limited to displays on the walls of the room. This means that visitors are left with two possibilities; they can either look at the animals in the centre of the room hanging from the roof or they can engage further in the displays on the walls and the objects on display in the glass cases. Except from the few hands-on elements, social learning is taking a backseat compared to the display on the previous level of *Animal World*. This might, however, enhance the possibility of personal learning especially for visitors with intrapersonal intelligences because it makes it easier to reflect on what you see and read along the walls.

The biggest issue in the exhibition seems to be space, there is very little room for visitors to move around in, especially on days with many visitors. It can therefore be difficult to take the proper time to indulge in further information because visitors are more or less being ‘pushed’ around. However, the room seems to provide a good learning space especially for analytical adult learners with logical-mathematical intelligences who can engage their children in hands-on elements as part of the display.

Adventure Planet and Survival

The final two displays of *Natural World* are situated at level five of the building. First is a smaller adventure and experimental room containing the display *Adventure Planet*. This display contains almost everything that revolves around interactive and playing activities for both children and adults. Large skeletons, drawing boards, animal tracks, smelling and sound effects, etc. are part of the learning and interactive elements. It is possible to study and compare fossils, get up close to a black rhino, measure yourself against a stegosaurus and place your hands into the tracks of a dinosaur from the Isle of Skye. The display directly encourages visitors to “*encounter, explore and investigate*” (National Museum of Scotland: website).

Next to *Adventure Planet* we find the last display in the *Natural World* galleries, *Survival*. This display provides a more in-depth approach to how animal life evolves, the processes of evolution and extinction and diversity of life on earth. It is still possible to see the large animals from *Wildlife Panorama* and there are many animals on display in the exhibition as well. As a very distinct contrast to the interactive experiment display

next door, *Survival* proposes a more serious and less playful approach to in-depth learning; among other things the display also raises the issue of human impact on animal life and nature, as well as questions of pollution and global environment issues. It asks the threatening question: “*Are we on the brink of the next mass extinction?*” (National Museum of Scotland: website).

These two final displays of *Natural World* encompass two very different interactive approaches. In *Adventure Planet* we see more playful and entertaining approaches which seem very suitable for children, and in *Survival* the display deals with more serious questions of survival and extinction through more in-depth information. It is possible to see elements of both discovery learning and constructivist learning in these two displays. This is seen in the reflection of visitors having been through all six displays when they reach these final two. *Survival* provides space for reflection on all aspects of the *Natural World* galleries and makes visitors see the exhibition as a whole and not just six independent displays.

The *Adventure Planet* clearly appeals more to visitors with spatial, naturalistic, perhaps even musical, bodily-kinaesthetic and interpersonal skills. It is a place for experimenting and entertainment. Imaginative, common-sense and also dynamic learners will find this useful in their learning approach.

The *Survival* display also appeals to visitors with linguistic, logical-mathematical and especially intrapersonal skills. It might also appeal to the imaginative and common-sense learner, but it also has elements that the analytical learner will respond to. It still presents a mix of the experimental and the narrational windows. The hands-on approach very much dominates the *Adventure Planet* section, whereas *Survival* puts the story and themes in the centre.

In *Adventure Planet*, physical and social learning is in focus; it is very easy to become involved with the activities as part of a social group (either as part of a family or school group for example). *Survival* also considers personal learning further by asking questions that require the visitor to reflect on both prior knowledge and on what the displays have presented over all.

Wildlife Panorama

One of the dominant factors of the *Natural World* galleries is the *Wildlife Panorama*, not just because visitors are constantly surrounded by animals, but also because the animals hanging from the roof add a very new and unexpected use of the rooms to the visitor experience. It does not matter where you look there will always be animals around you. The panorama is supplemented by large screens showing film clips of animals in their natural habitats. In this way the galleries make sure (in a very clear way) that visitors never forget which part of the museum galleries they are entering. It also makes the displays very appealing to children of any age not just because they generally seem very fascinated by the life-sized animals, but also because of the many hands-on elements often situated within reach and placed in almost every room. Although fascinating, *Wildlife Panorama* can seem a bit overwhelming, not just because of the sheer size of the animals, but also because different species that normally do not have anything to do with one another in nature are placed together. You might get the impression that the curators got a bit carried away in their eagerness in this section or “... *perhaps even wantonness*” (Lewis and Johnson-Symington 2011: 44).

Natural World does provide spaces for more analytical learning as well although this is generally not the focus of any of the displays. It might also sometimes be a bit of a problem for visitors to move around in the exhibitions on levels three and five in the building, mainly on days with many visitors, because there is not much room along the walls in the gallery despite the fact that visitor numbers clearly decrease the higher up you get. On the other hand, this might, in return, provide opportunities to reflect on the individual objects in the glass cases, especially on level three in *Animal Senses*.



Image 4: View from the top floor of the Natural World Galleries (Photo: Jane Nielsen, June 2012).

The museum has focused on visitors' interaction with objects from a very early stage of the exhibition planning. Animals are in focus everywhere. The top floors still seem to be less visited than the first floors in the building, but the museum has clearly tried to find a very direct way of dealing with this problem by building their displays vertically instead of putting all elements of the same exhibition on the same floor. This approach is not seen at many large museums and may create an element of confusion. However, once visitors get the hang of this concept, it may actually plant a wish in them to come back to the museum and see the displays again - this time more prepared for the exhibition design.

Case Study: British Golf Museum

We get a very different idea of how learning styles have been approached and interpreted by looking at a smaller specialised museum: The British Golf Museum. This

museum focuses on one particular sport and is located opposite the Clubhouse at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club in St Andrews, Scotland.

In 1985, The Royal and Ancient Golf Club made the decision to fund the building of the British Golf Museum by setting up a separate charitable trust to build and then run the museum. However, the origins of the museum go back to the 1880s when the first items were placed on display at the clubhouse. The museum opened in 1990 and documents the history of golf from medieval times to the present. This includes both men's and women's games, British and international golf and golf for both professionals and amateurs. The galleries and collections include everything from historical equipment, memorabilia, art works, documentation, the history of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, and the rules and terminology of the game. In 2004, the museum opened a new reception and shop area and had upgraded at least one gallery every year (British Golf Museum: website).

A museum this specialised naturally applies to a very specific audience. In many ways, it is mainly visitors who already play golf or who are fans of the game who visit this museum; although the museum naturally seeks to make the game and its history interesting for non-golfers as well. A relatively small and specialised museum is not only dependent on a strong founder and trust but also very much on its location. When it comes to attracting visitors, the British Golf Museum has a large advantage in its location close to the oldest golf courses in the world, as well as the history and myths that surrounds them, which is also reflected in the exhibitions.

The galleries at British Golf Museum follow a specific chronological route around the exhibition spaces. Visitors are led around the displays beginning with the *Origins of golf gallery* and then they move forward in time until they reach *The 18th hole*. Visitors are firstly presented with *The Dictionary Corner* before they get started on the gallery route. In this small corner at the beginning of the displays, it is possible to learn about the origin of some of the most common golf terms.

Most of the galleries are divided into historical themes, and the exhibition covers the following galleries: *Dictionary Corner*, *Origins of Golf Gallery*, *18th century Golf Gallery*, *Early 19th century Golf Gallery*, *Mid Victorian Golf Gallery*, *The Edwardian Art Gallery & 19th century Club Life Gallery*, *Unusual Clubs & The Open*

Championship 1892 – 1914, Inter-War Golf Gallery, The Modern Golf Gallery, Golf in the 21st century and The 18th Hole (British Golf Museum: website).

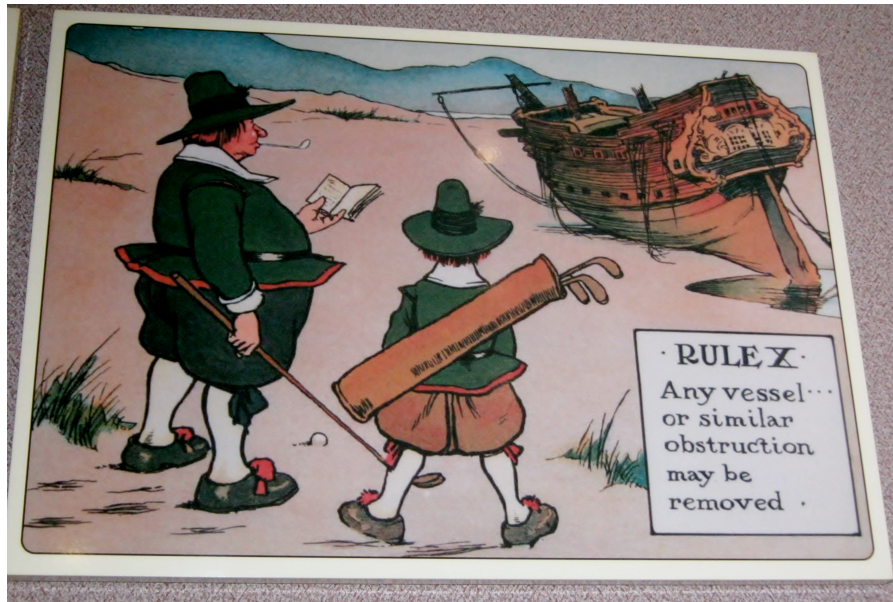


Image 5: A humorous approach on posters in *The Dictionary Corner* (Photo: Jane Nielsen, October 2012).



Image 6: Technological developments in craftsmanship demonstrated through clubs and text labels on display (Photo: Jane Nielsen, October 2012).

The first three galleries consist of golf equipment in the shape of golf clubs and balls from all times of the game's existence, tools that were used to make this equipment and descriptions of techniques, drawings and pictures of golfers, their clothes, game techniques and of the golf courses, their design and development. The first three galleries also contain clothes, shoes, medals and trophies as visitors move up in time throughout the exhibition. In between the more technical descriptions of equipment and techniques, the museum also displays large human-sized models of craftsmen in their workshops making clubs, balls or other equipment. In the *18th century golf gallery* it is also possible to experience a display of two upper-class gentlemen (figurines) standing in front of the clubhouse discussing the game. Visitors can then listen to their taped fictional conversation, which takes a humorous approach to the common belief that golf is very much a game for the upper-class. In the *Mid Victorian Golf Gallery* and the *Edwardian Art Gallery & 19th century Club Life Gallery*, the museum has some of its best and oldest paintings and drawings on display. The vast interest for the game has resulted in many artworks with a golfing theme during this period. These two galleries provide a very distinct break from the equipment and model displays seen so far. These two galleries also present replicas of the Claret Jug, the Championship Belt and other trophies, as well as quite a lot of text on posters for further information on the game and its historical development. The rules of the game are immensely detailed and complicated from very early on and in the galleries it is often possible to read small quotations from the old rules as they were described by The Royal and Ancient Golf Club.

The galleries also pay particular attention to the development of golf clubs and the Open Championship from 1892 to 1914, culminating in the *Inter-war golf gallery* where the game begins to take a modern and better-known form. *The Modern Golf Gallery* and *Golf in the 21st century* concentrates on modern golf from after the Second World War to today. The focus is on equipment and on the development of the many varied golf tournaments and professional players. It also focuses on how the rules have developed to fit the global, multi-million pound business that golf is today. *Golf in the 21st century* also features some of the strange and funny aspects of the modern game including a golf themed toilet seat and The World Ice Golf Championship, which is an

extraordinary event held almost 600 km north of the Arctic Circle on the west coast of Greenland. Also TV clips from tournaments and of famous golfers are shown and equipment like clubs, balls, gloves, shoes, score cards, etc. from some of the greatest players are on display.

The final display at the museum is *The 18th Hole* where it is possible to try your own skills on a mini putting green. Visitors can try their hand at putting using replicas of the old golf clubs and balls and compare them to the modern day golf clubs. It is also possible for children to put up their own golf drawings on display and the museum is planning to put a costume dressing-up wardrobe in this section as well (British Golf Museum: website).



Image 7: Visitors can try out the old clubs and golf balls in *The 18th Hole* gallery (Photo: Jane Nielsen, October 2012).

At first glance it seems like the museum is taking a very traditional, systematic approach in its exhibition. The galleries are arranged chronologically and visitors are led around a certain route in the galleries. However, it is also possible to spot elements of Hein's discovery museum especially in the final gallery where hands-on elements dominate. Visitors with spatial and naturalistic intelligences will probably find most of the galleries appealing since they all have elements of photos, pictures and paintings

and are mostly from an outdoor perspective. Also, golf course designs will appeal to these two intelligences. The chronological exhibition approach will seem very familiar to visitors with logical-mathematical intelligences and there is plenty of text to read in almost all galleries to increase in-depth knowledge about the game and its history. The hands-on approach taken in the final galleries will appeal to bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence as well but also descriptions and posters showing different techniques on golf swings and movement will make good sense to visitors with this particular sense. Finally, visitors with both interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences might actually feel quite at home in the exhibition because it is possible to view the galleries in a social context. The final gallery in particular encourages socialising and sharing experiences and the large displays with models in workshops can form nice settings for sharing the museum experience. However, it is also possible to walk around the galleries alone or to pause and reflect on certain elements. This seems particularly obvious in the *Mid Victorian Golf* and the *Edwardian Art Gallery & 19th century Club Life* galleries. Both of these galleries seem to take a more reflective and analytical approach to visitor interaction; there are more texts in these galleries, objects on display are mainly paintings, drawings and pictures and there are no sound or interactive elements in these galleries either as it could be experienced in the *18th century Golf* and *Early 19th century Golf* galleries and again in some of the final galleries.

It is possible to see elements of all four types of McCarthy's and Leflar's learners in the galleries. The imaginative learner will enjoy the exhibition elements where he/she is directly involved both through hands-on activities but also the more reflective parts of the exhibition where it is possible to be personally involved in the learning processes. The analytical learner will enjoy the chronological development of the exhibition and when facts and rules of the game are presented logically. The common-sense learner will mainly find the hands-on elements in the final galleries exciting. However, the bodily-kinaesthetic approach to golf and the displays with models and sounds will be appealing to them as well. Finally, the dynamic learner will probably enjoy the flexibility of the exhibition and the changing settings. However, it might also be likely that the dynamic learner will find the galleries too similar and not challenging or risk-taking enough.

There are certain elements of the quantitative window throughout the exhibition, especially because the galleries always display straightforward facts about the game and its history amongst all the other elements. The aesthetic window is present as well especially in the galleries focusing on painting and picture presentations. Then of course the experimental window is represented in the final gallery's hands-on activities and in the interaction with stories told through human shaped models and in workshops.

If we consider Falk's and Dierking's personal learning it is interesting to notice how personal learning is mostly influenced by prior knowledge. It is an advantage to have a certain degree of prior knowledge of golf, of its history, or of professional golfers before visiting the museum. In fact, most visitors (even though they might not actually play golf themselves) will undoubtedly have some sort of interest in the game before visiting a specialised museum like this. This naturally shapes the personal learning and enthusiasm.

Social learning will also have a very important impact on the learning process. Most visitors will probably visit the museum with family, friends or as part of a group. It is unlikely that school classes will choose the museum over, for example, national museums for their class visits. However, it is clear that children play an important part in the learning processes in the exhibitions, especially in the final galleries. It is, however, also possible to visit the exhibition alone and gain a profound knowledge of the game, which analytical learners with intrapersonal intelligences will probably find this appealing.

Physical learning seems to concentrate on how the visitor is led through the galleries. Even though it is possible to go back to a previous gallery it is clear that the museum has created a specific chronological route for visitors to follow. This makes the learning experience very controlled and clear. It is impossible to miss any parts of the exhibition because you have to walk through all of them and visitors are never in doubt about where to go next. Also, the location of the museum close to the Old Course and clubhouse in St Andrews clearly creates a very special atmosphere for many golf fans and might enhance the physical learning experience.

Learning Theories in the two Exhibitions

No matter how different these two case-studies seem, it is possible to identify various learning styles in both of them. The intention with these two exhibition analyses is not to compare them - that is not really possible when dealing with two so very different museums with different resources in everything from staff, economy, visitors, facilities, location, policies, etc. Instead the analyses are meant to show how both of them have approached learning and communication in their own ways. As mentioned, analyses like these will always be subjective and depend on what the observer sees and expects. However, by using learning theories as a basis for the exhibition analyses, the museums' focus and intention become clearer.

The National Museum of Scotland has made it very clear that it wanted visitors to interact with the objects from the beginning in the *Natural World* galleries. The museum has tried to accomplish this by literally surrounding visitors with animals and hands-on elements almost to an overwhelming degree. Sometimes interaction feels more dominant than the actual objects on display and it is often difficult to identify what visitors are meant to learn or experience from the different exhibition settings. It can therefore seem as if the museum has tried to embrace too many different learning or communication styles. Although that seems like an admirable effort, it is not necessarily something museums should strive for. The development of new learning styles, communication approaches and designs will increase as new technological opportunities are developed. However, this does not mean that museums (not even larger national museums with collections covering a very wide historical and cultural span and who have various communications and learning resources at their disposal) should try to embrace all of them. In fact, that seems neither possible nor useful. Instead, the real challenge for museums seems to be to identify which approaches apply to their particular collections and learning aims and implement these in the exhibition communication. One approach that clearly seems to fail at the museum is the attempt to make visitors reach the top floors; no matter which day or what time of day you visit the museum there are considerably more people on the lower floors than on the top floor. It is, however, impossible not to interact with the objects at National Museum of Scotland to a certain degree when walking around the exhibitions, which makes the social context of the exhibition very strong.

The British Golf Museum has a very well documented and noticeable history to tell and it tries to accomplish this by putting up a chronological ‘time-line’ with as many items, paintings and objects in it as possible for visitors to follow. The museum does not try to hide the fact that the best hands-on element is right outside its doors (in the shape of the golf courses), so instead the museum has limited hands-on elements to the final part of the gallery. Also, with so much equipment, artworks and text to display, the galleries can seem a bit too full and intense for visitors no matter if they just want a basic overview of the game and its history or if they want to engage in it as much as possible. However, there are learning elements that will appeal to almost every type of learner throughout the galleries without being too overwhelming.

This section has looked at the theoretical concept and definition of communication and learning within the museum space. Although many theories have not originally been shaped and formed directly to fit museum practice, many of the same principles still apply to museums, as we see from the work of Hein, Hooper-Greenhill, Black and others who have attempted to implement communication and learning theories in museum practices. Through their work it becomes possible to analyse museum exhibitions through some of these theories and it becomes a bit clearer how museums actually approach their learning and communication from a practical point of view. We can see the development of museum learning evolve outside the museum exhibition as well. As seen in ICOM’s definitions of museums from 2001 and 2007 and in the Generic Learning Outcomes programme, museums not only seek to define but also measure learning outcome as directly as possible. There is no doubt that this will be carried out in many different ways in the future as new methods and practices develop. However, as institutions shaped and developed during the Enlightenment, many contemporary museums are still rooted in some of these traditional learning structures. This is clearly reflected in their learning today and will undoubtedly continue to be in the future as well.

This section has analysed the learning and communication elements of two very different museum exhibitions to seek out some of these learning and communication

theories in practice. This is to prove that communication and learning is indeed something that not only concerns all museums, but also exists at very different levels. Museums can choose many different approaches when communicating with visitors and naturally their communication and learning is shaped by the types of visitors they welcome and their general resources, among many factors.

Besides, the actual learning theories described and identified in these two exhibitions, it is also possible to gain an idea of how learning in general has developed in museum practice. Although the British Golf Museum has updated elements of its galleries since the beginning in 1990, it is still possible to see elements of the more traditional analytical exhibition approaches in its galleries. The chronological approach where visitors are led around the exhibition and posters with long texts, is still featured in this exhibition. Some visitors enjoy this approach although many museums are clearly moving away from it in their learning and communication.

The National Museum of Scotland has recently been through a major refurbishment and has had the possibility to dispose of any elements left over from the text-heavy exhibitions of the past and has instead implemented both new technological features and visual elements in their exhibitions. Also, the museum has chosen to focus quite heavily on interaction between visitors and objects. This approach might appeal to some visitors and not to others, nevertheless, it tells a great deal about how museum communication and learning is developing at the moment with the postmodern concept clearly influencing practices as well as theories.

Section 3: Questionnaire Analysis

Questionnaire to Museums

To investigate museums' own view of their exhibition learning and communication I conducted a questionnaire in the spring/summer of 2012. The first three questions of the questionnaire will be analysed in detail in this chapter. However, before analysing the answers it is necessary to describe the background for conducting the questionnaire, form a detailed description of how the answers will be analysed, and discuss the theoretical aspects of questionnaires.

Questionnaires have often been seen as a 'remote' way of communicating because the conversation is essentially created by someone who is not present (Brace 2008: 5). However, this also gives the respondent time to consider answers and decide if, when or how to answer. When constructing qualitative research questions like this, the lack of interaction can be a problem; questions might be understood differently than intended and elaboration of specific answers is rarely possible. However, by creating a similar set of questions to ask a number of museums, comparison, evaluation and analysis become easier. The aim of this research is to gather an in-depth understanding of the behaviours, thoughts and actions behind museums' own learning and communication approaches. Generally, the qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision-making, as opposed to the quantitative method which focuses on the what, where and when elements (Brace 2008; Gillham 2000; Oppenheim 2000). I have added one voluntary quantitative question about visitor numbers and number of staff at the museum to create an indication of the capacity, size and resources of each museum (although it is not possible to form a distinct view of these aspects from visitor and staff numbers alone). I have also asked about the title or position of the person answering the questionnaire in order to gain an impression of their level of involvement in learning and communication matters. Where possible, the questionnaire was sent to exhibition curators, exhibition managers or learning and communication officers.

Questionnaires can be written, conducted and used in many ways and with

different purposes (Brace 2008: 2-4). This questionnaire sets out to define which aspects of communication practices museums themselves see as their most important characteristics to engender learning and interaction. The questionnaire consists of ten questions dealing with exhibition learning and communication, exhibition practices and future exhibition communication perspectives. They are meant to represent practical reflections of questions worth considering at museums (MacMahon 2010: website). Museums were given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire online and with as long or short answers, as they preferred. The questions were deliberately kept very open for further discussion, and museums were asked to express their subjective views (Appendix 1).

Discourse Analysis

Museums will naturally approach the process of answering research questions very differently. The social structures behind the process can therefore be just as interesting to analyse as the chosen discussion topics and they might form interesting perspectives on why the different museums answer as they do (Brace 2008; Chalmers 1999; Gillham 2000; Oppenheim 2000). Later in this chapter I will analyse how museums see their own exhibition learning and communication practices by carrying out a discourse analysis of some of the answers. Through different discussions of the subjects approached in the questionnaire I will try to identify how museums view their own opportunities and try to establish how these views have developed.

As will be discussed further in chapter two, Foucault defined the cultural and historical discourse frame of various periods. By this he meant the set or series of rules and guidelines by which the world could be experienced. Among other things he describes the discourses as meaning structures, which are determined by social relations and therefore reflective of what makes sense in a given period of time (Foucault 2002: 235-240). Discourses can thus be regarded as a certain way of understanding and viewing the world. The discourse is regarded as truth or something that makes sense. Discourses are created by principles that build the discourse or meaning.

The focus of discourse analysis is any form of written or spoken language, such as a conversation or a newspaper article. The main topic of interest is the underlying

social structures, which may be assumed or played out within the conversation. It concerns the sorts of tools and strategies people use when engaged in communication. For example slowing one's speech for emphasis, use of metaphors, and choice of particular words to display affect. The purpose of the analysis is to attempt to identify categories, themes, ideas, views, roles, etc. within the text itself and to identify commonly shared discursive resources or shared patterns of talking.

I believe Foucault's discourse theory is closely related to Luhmann's system theory, which states that basically everything is made up of a series of systems (Luhmann 1995b). Society is made up of a series of sub-systems that all conduct a special function. Science, for example, is among these differentiated social systems, and within the system of science is the sub-system of sociology.

Every function or system has a meaning code that reflects a basic value or discourse. A meaning code is a way to distinguish elements within a system from those elements not belonging to that system. In other words, it is the basic language of a functional system. According to Luhmann a system will only understand and use its own code, and will not understand nor use the code of another system. It is not possible to import the code of one system into another because systems are closed and can only react to things within their environment. An example is the political system's meaning code which can be identified as 'power/non-power', the health system's code as 'ill/non-ill', a military system as 'peace/non-peace', etc. This is of course a very simple way of viewing these meaning codes. As expected, a meaning code will never have an equal balance between its two definitions; all systems will naturally always strive for the positive aspect of the meaning code. This also means that all meaning codes are essentially subjective because what is regarded as power or not power, or truth or not truth, is subject to an individual's subjective thinking (Luhmann 1995b: 59-102).

It is often possible to observe a new meaning code within another meaning code. Sometimes a new standard for what is considered good or 'best' within a specific system or social group can set a new standard for what everyone else in the system is striving for. We have already been looking at a few examples; Anderson's report *A common Wealth* from 1997 (Anderson 1997) and the creation of the *Inspiring Learning for all* programme (GLO: website). These initiatives created new standards for museum learning and communication and were generally regarded as positive. According to

Luhmann, it is also possible to make a meaning code positive through communication. Communication can create a new common frame of reference for social groups or systems and thus set new standards for what is regarded as positive and good. Luhmann believed all this was essentially down to communication. One might even go as far as to say that in a society, communication is communicating with communication. People are simply the 'medium' through which communication takes place. It is not possible to think independently without communication. Luhmann believed that all learning is created within communication. What Luhmann sought to accomplish with these definitions was to create order in very complex social systems defined solely through their communication (Luhmann 1995b: 59-102, 137-175, 437-477).

To sum up the basic perspectives of Luhmann's social systems we can identify seven important points:

- 1) Socially, communication cannot communicate with everything at the same time.
- 2) Complexity has to be reduced (this can be done by e.g. identifying simple meaning codes).
- 3) Communication has to be selective (e.g. by choosing what is 'true or not' - what is 'right' or 'wrong'.
- 4) Meaning codes have to be defined within their historically meaning code (what could be regarded as 'true' a hundred years ago might not be anymore - new meaning codes are created in different contexts all the time).
- 5) Meaning codes 'codify' themselves from within - this means that new systems will arise from 'old' systems.
- 6) Systems of communication are self-organised, self-referencing and self-defining.
- 7) Systems of communication are separated from systems of psychology, living systems and mechanical systems.

If we look at the meaning code of museum communication through this simplistic and subjective approach it becomes clear that it has developed vastly over the past decades. During the 1970s it could be argued that the meaning code would reflect 'education/non-education' dichotomy; this slowly evolved to a 'learning/non-learning'

dichotomy as education was regarded as a formal way of learning and museums sought to influence informal learning as well. In the 1980s and 1990s it changed to 'experience/non-experience' or perhaps 'inclusion/non-inclusion'. In the last part of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium many elements changed into 'commercial/non-commercial'. During the past few years when exhibition practice has been focused on life-long learning and interactive experiences, and the museum's role as social communicator, the meaning code can be viewed as 'present/non-present', 'engaging/non-engaging' or perhaps even 'relevant/non-relevant'.

It is important to stress that a discourse analysis always remains a matter of interpretation. As there is no hard data provided through discourse analysis, the reliability and the validity of one's own research or findings depends on the force and logic of one's arguments. Even the best-constructed arguments are subject to their own deconstructive reading and counter-interpretations. One can therefore say that the validity of the analysis is dependent on the quality of the rhetoric. However, a discourse analysis can provide a very sound identification of the underlying social structures that determine why museums have answered the way they have, and therefore how we are to understand the answers.

Theories of Discourse Analysis

"Discourse analysis is not just one approach, but a series of interdisciplinary approaches that can be used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies" (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 1).

Discourse analysis is based on theories of social perspectives and mechanisms and has been influenced by many different theorists and researchers; Ferdinand de Saussure who developed structuralism, Jacques Lacan and the principles of post structuralism and Jacques Derrida - just to mention a few. Foucault has played a central role in the development of discourse analysis. His focus was primarily on genealogy and power relations, and therefore closely related to Luhmann's ideas of social systems. These different understandings of social philosophy and theory have been developed into a poststructuralist discourse framework by political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 1-2). In *"Hegemony and Socialist*

Strategy” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) they discussed varied discursive constitutions of class, political identity and social self-understanding. Their work revolves around the principles of critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology. They see the process as a kind of package that contains philosophical premises regarding the role of language in social constructions, theoretical models, and methodological guidelines for how to approach a research domain and finally specific techniques for analysis: *“In discourse analysis, theory and method are intertwined and researchers must accept the basic philosophical premises in order to use discourse analysis as their method of empirical study”* (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 4). However, it is possible to create one’s own ‘package’ by combining elements from different discourse analytical perspectives. This requires that: *“...the analyst has to work with what has actually been said or written, exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality”* (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 21).

Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory is often described as a ‘pure’ poststructuralist theory (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 6-7). It is also closely related to Foucault’s understanding of power relations, which argues that power is responsible for creating social structures and for the particular ways in which the world is formed and can be talked about. Power is both a productive and a constraining force and Foucault’s conception of power is closely connected to Laclau and Mouffe’s theory and principles of discursive psychology.

Luhmann stated that we only have access to the physical world through observation. The moment we begin to observe something, a different setting is in operation between what we observe and what we do not observe (Luhmann 1995b: 12-58). The difference between the system and its surroundings is what creates identity. Luhmann also believed that systems were characterised by being closed, self-referencing and self-creating (Luhmann 1995b: 12-58). The difference between a system and its surroundings is created through definitions of meaning made possible by communication. According to Luhmann communication is not controlled by the sender but by what the receiver hears and experiences. Communication within a system operates by selecting a limited amount of all external information. Communication is therefore an essential element to all learning within the system simply because the

system has to open up to a proper disturbance in order to create and invent (Bal 1996; Borch 2011; Hawkes 1977; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002; Luhmann 1995a; 1995b; Simpson 1996; 2004).

A system cannot be open to new influences or perspectives all the time; a system will refer to its choices from its own understandings and therefore can only open up to its surroundings when it comes across a disturbance. As systems are closed and self-referencing, a disturbance will only arise when the system is able to reflect upon its own differences (Luhmann 1995b: 437-477). We also see this approach in Foucault's development of the discourse analysis. In many ways, Foucault's discourse analysis and Luhmann's theory of social systems share the same strategic platform. A discourse analysis can therefore create a disturbance itself (Danelund og Jørgensen 2002: 331). It is actually possible to observe this pattern in the museums' reactions to the questionnaire; some museums are clearly open to 'a disturbance' and embrace it whilst others chose to be closed and self-referencing.

According to discourse analysts Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Phillips, there are a number of analytical strategies that can be applied when conducting a discourse analysis (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 138-174):

- 1) **Comparison.** One of the simplest ways of building an impression of the nature of a text is to compare it with other texts. This is a well-known structuralist perspective; a statement always gains meaning by being different from other statements.
- 2) **Substitution.** This is a form of comparison too where the analyst creates the text for comparison. Substitution involves substituting a word with a different word, resulting in two versions of the text that can be compared.
- 3) **Exaggeration of detail.** To exaggerate details involves blowing a particular textual detail out of proportion. The analyst may, for example, have identified a feature in the text, which appears odd or significant. However, since it might just be one isolated feature it can be difficult to know what the significance is or how it might relate to the text as a whole. To explore the significance of certain elements in a text it can be useful to over-exaggerate

it and ask what conditions might be necessary in order for this element to make sense.

- 4) **Multivocality.** This approach consists of a description of different voices or discursive logics in the text. The aim of multivocality is to generate new questions to pose to the text. For example, what characterises the different voices of this text? What meanings do the different voices contribute? This strategy can be used to build on the results of an exaggeration of details by ‘adding’ voices to specific details (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 146-154).

Analysis can begin with any one of these strategies; the analyst can switch back and forth from one to the other and not necessary use all of them. The idea of these analytical strategies is to develop an understanding of the material and give more specific ideas for how to apply the different analytical tools of the discourse approach. Sometimes it might make more sense to focus on similarities and differences, and other times on specific details or voices in a text.

In the following sections, I will analyse the first three answers to questions about the exhibition learning and communication practices given by the respondent museums using a combination of these analytical strategies. I will try to identify key terms or words in the answers by using comparison, substitution and exaggeration of detail, and form a discussion of why museums might answer the ways that they have. I have chosen different replies from various museums to form a closer analysis of how museums in general view their communication and learning. This will of course not create a definite, representational view of communication and learning elements of all museums but rather display general tendencies and thoughts stated by selected museum professionals. The analysis will set out to compare both similarities and differences in communication practices at museums throughout UK. Equally, it is possible to view future possibilities and tendencies by analysing how these questions are approached.

The aim and purpose of the discourse analysis is to:

- 1) Establish which communication, learning and interaction elements museums themselves regard as important.

- 2) Identify central terms of communication practices seen in connection with the museum itself and community engagement and cooperation.
- 3) Form and contribute to the on-going discussions of key elements in museum communication, interaction and experience.
- 4) Seek to provoke a suitable 'disturbance' within the museum system to create new communication, interaction and learning perspectives from established practices.

Analysing Questionnaire Answers

The questionnaire was sent to fifty museums geographically spread across the UK. In order to form a varied and thorough view of how museums themselves view their exhibition approaches the questionnaire was sent to many different types of museums:

1) Large national museums covering aspects of everything from art, architecture, history and archaeology; 2) Specialised museums dealing with one or a few specialised themes or persons; 3) Art galleries and museums; 4) Natural history museums; 5) University museums; and 6) Small local museums dealing with local history/archaeology and often with limited resources compared to larger national museums. Fifteen museums have replied to the questionnaire. Although it would have created a basis for better and more in-depth analyses if more museums had chosen to answer, the fifteen replies come from a varied range of museums and present some very useful and thought-provoking answers.

The first three questions concentrate on general exhibition learning and communication practices. The next three questions focus on exhibition practices and finally the last three questions deal with future perspectives or expectations on learning and communication (in the final question it was possible to add further comments). It is possible to read all answers in the appendices - however, there is only room for a few answers of each question in the analysis that follows. The answers are selected to represent as varied views as possible although common trends can be seen frequently.

Museum Reactions

When conducting qualitative questionnaires like this it should be expected that a

number of museums are not going to answer. Also, the length and quality of responses will vary immensely. However, this can also tell a lot about how museums prioritise these questions in their everyday work (Ames 1994; Brace 2008; Gillham 2000; Oppenheim 2000; Wallace 1995). Some museums might never have thought much about their exhibition communication, some have very old exhibitions that have not been updated or developed for years and some might simply find that these questions do not concern them. Of course it should also be noted that most museum staff are very busy and therefore choose not to prioritise answering questionnaires. Other museums have taken the task of completing the questionnaire very seriously and several members of staff might have partaken in the response. These museums have taken the questionnaire as an opportunity to discuss these matters further within their internal communication approach. Answers will therefore also depend on how the museum usually responds to questionnaires and if the museum has a tradition of encouraging internal discussions on common practices between members of staff.

These approaches became clear during the conduction of this questionnaire. During the first few weeks after the questionnaire had been sent to the museums, I began receiving replies from museums that had been very interested in these communication and learning perspectives. I received emails where some of the museums expressed how they had used the questionnaire to form discussions and encourage new ways of thinking among staff members. Others had simply had interesting informal discussions in their lunch breaks and clearly took great pride in how they had developed their exhibitions over the years.

Interestingly, I also received emails from museums that had not replied to the questionnaire yet and indeed some never did. Some of these expressed concerns about specific questions that they did not feel applied to their museum (not many of these emails focused on the same questions as their reason for concern). An example of this was a museum that was precluded from changing the museum physically and therefore feared that the questionnaire would not give adequate scope to state why the museum deployed certain forms of interpretation or outreach but could not engage with others. Although I replied that I knew about the physical limitations of the museum building and that was exactly why I would like to hear about their exhibition approach because I imagined they would have to think very creatively about their design, the museum had

clearly chosen to focus on their own limitations instead of their opportunities. Other museums focused on the use of specific words in the questionnaire; e.g. 'unique' in question two which two museums did not believe to be the best word to stress - even though they both use them on their websites to stress learning facilities and visitor events. In fact, 'unique' or 'special' are words that can be found on most museums' websites. Or that the terms 'learning' and 'communication' were two very different areas that should be kept separated. In fact, most museums seemed to respond positively to the word 'learning', often because the museum had a learning strategy or policy to refer to. However, the word 'communication' seemed to cause some confusion. Most museums either connected this term to their learning facilities or to their marketing programme. Not many seemed to connect it directly to their exhibitions or as part of their daily interaction with visitors.

These replies all give an impression of how differently museum staff thinks of and implements these terms. It is only natural that replies will be very different. However, it seemed as if some museums were actually making excuses for themselves as to how they were approaching (or not approaching) matters of exhibition learning and communication, and therefore felt they had to comment on this either before answering the questionnaire or before choosing not to. Other museums had clearly taken the questionnaire as a welcome 'disturbance' to form some new perspectives on their practices or to evaluate their own approaches. These reactions will be clearer in the analyses.

It should be made clear that it has certainly not been the purpose of this questionnaire to find 'flaws' or limitations in individual museum structures. The sole purpose has been to identify museums' own views and attitude towards their communication and learning approaches - a point which was made clear for the museums before answering the questionnaire.

Discourse Analysis: Exhibition Learning and Communication

"You need to consider the key characteristics that will attract targeted audiences to the museum, and distinguish your museum both from every other one and from other types of competitors" (Black 2012: 51).

The first three questions of the questionnaire concentrate on museums' exhibition learning and communication practices. As Black mentions, it is important to consider and identify the key characteristics that make your museum unique and what elements that distinguish your museum from everyone else.

To begin the questionnaire I asked a question about key characteristics of the museum's learning and communication facilities:

QUESTION 1:

***What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication facilities?
Can you name a few characteristics?***

Five of the museums that answered this question answered thusly:

Leicester Museums and Galleries - Liz Wilson, Collections, Interpretation and Learning Manager: *"Access to artefacts, neutral learning space, specialist staff - the same as all other museums really".*

Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh - Susan Gardner, Curator: *"I don't think the museum is unique in that respect. We don't do anything particularly differently to other museums".*

The Orkney Museum - Tom Muir, Exhibitions Officer: *"The Orkney Museum is held in Tankerness House, an historic Grade A listed building dating from the 16th century and has a public garden at the back. As a town house of a merchant laird family, the Baikies, we have interpretation about the house and family within the museum. It is also visited by local school groups as an historic building as well as a museum. The collection itself covers all periods of Orkney's prehistory and history and is the main museum for the islands".*

National Museums Scotland – C. Sexton, Exhibition Co-ordinator: *"I do not think that we are unique in terms of Learning and communication. Only the objects and the*

way chosen to display them is unique. Within special exhibitions and perm displays we try to provide visitors a variety of ways to engage with the objects, using new technology, hands on interactivity and traditional text and images”.

The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester - Henry McGhie, Head of Collections and Curator of Zoology: *“-engagement with current research and researchers -recognition of different learning styles and motivations in interpretation - tackling difficult or complex subjects in honest manner -intellectually grounded bravery -focusing on encouraging people to think for themselves, rather than telling them what to think -repositioning museum with colonialist and imperialist origins in postcolonial context -engaging with big societal issues”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Dismissive of uniqueness:** *“The same as all other museums”, “Don’t do anything particularly different from other museums”, “Do not think we are unique in terms of learning and communication”.*
- **Variation of offers:** *“recognition of different learning styles and motivations in interpretation”, “focusing on encouraging people to think for themselves, rather than telling them what to think”, “try to provide visitors a variety of ways to engage with the objects”.*

Discussion of answers: Surprisingly, only a few museums seem to have a clear idea of what makes them unique compared to other museums. The answers from The Orkney Museum and The Manchester Museum have focused specifically on the museums’ own services and offers. This, of course, does not mean that their exhibition or communication is unique or special compared to others. However, they have considered certain key characteristics (Black 2012: 51) and identification of uniqueness or specialness in order to attract target audiences seems to be the first step to forming an original communication practice.

What is very extraordinary is that three of these five museums directly describe their exhibition learning and communication as not being particularly unique or like all other museums. Sexton from the National Museums Scotland believes objects to be

more important stating: *“Only the objects and the way chosen to display them is unique”*. This suggests that learning and communication is not something that is thought about in connection with objects or when “chosen to display them” - a rather surprising (or perhaps very honest) statement from a large national museum. When visiting the National Museum of Scotland after their refurbishment it is clear that there is a strong focus on objects in the new galleries. However, the creation of a new learning centre as a key feature suggests that learning has indeed been a great part of the new refurbishment.

It does seem strange and rather disconcerting that so few museums seem to have a clear idea about what makes them unique in terms of communication and learning. One of the first external communication challenges a museum faces is usually good contact with potential visitors, and that typically begins by defining why visitors should pay the museum a visit and what the museum has to offer. Also, being asked about what makes them unique would seem to be a good opportunity for any museum to ‘promote’ itself. However, I have no doubt that the majority of the museums asked have a learning strategy and daily practice for how to approach these matters. What the answers might reflect therefore is that there is a lack of consciousness about how their communication works and how it might influence visitors.

There also seems to be common agreement that variation in services and offers are what characterises some museums or perhaps what they aim to do in the exhibition practices. To provide visitors with various ways of engaging with objects and collections and motivate their own interpretation seem to be something museums strive to achieve. This implies that some museums have indeed put a lot of thought into their exhibition communication and learning and not simply focused on objects or collections. Most museums may not know what works best in their exhibitions or which features get the most attention, but they show that they have recognised different learning styles and ways of experiencing through these answers.

The second question of the questionnaire focuses on particular resources or initiatives in learning and communication practices:

QUESTION 2:

In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most

important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

Five of the museums that answered this question answered thusly:

The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester - Henry McGhie, Head of Collections and Curator of Zoology: *“-staff who are well integrated across teams (specialists in learning, curatorial specialists who work well and regularly with one another, rather than in silos), participating visitors, exhibition design, a completely wonderful collection and reflective approach to developments”.*

Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh - Susan Gardner, Curator: *“I think that staff are the most important resource. Dedicated staff are required if the museum is going to make an impact both through communicating with visitors in the museum and promoting our activities to the wider world. A dedicated budget also helps”.*

Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Swansea University - Carolyn Graves-Brown, Curator: *“Use of volunteers of all ages and abilities to communicate Low tech aids”.*

MOMA WALES - Ruth Lambert, Exhibitions Organiser: *“Volunteer Gallery Attendants are our most important link with the public. Our website is crucial”.*

The Orkney Museum - Tom Muir, Exhibitions Officer: *“The Orkney Museum is very active in helping visiting television (and radio) programme makers with information and access to artefacts in our collection. We work with both foreign and UK production companies. The BBC receives lots of help from us and as a result our museum and staff (mostly me, actually) has recently appeared on the BBC 1 early evening magazine programme 'The One Show' with an estimated 20 million viewers, and on a forthcoming episode of the popular BBC television show 'Coast'. We have also appeared on Channel 4's 'Time Team' programme, as well as many other TV and radio programmes (usually several times in the course of the year). This promotes not only us*

but the Orkney Islands throughout the world. We are also featured regularly in both the local newspaper and BBC Radio Orkney, where we also have a regular history feature in one of their shows”.

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Staff:** *“Dedicated staff are required if the museum is going to make an impact both through communicating with visitors in the museum and promoting our activities”, “-staff who are well integrated across teams (specialists in learning, curatorial specialists who work well and regularly with one another, rather than in silos)”.*
- **Use of volunteers.:** *“Volunteer Gallery Attendants are our most important link with the public”, “Use of volunteers of all ages and abilities”.*

Discussion of answers: Two key features seem to dominate most answers; either a dedicated and well-trained staff or the use of volunteers to assist visitors. However, websites and press cooperation are also mentioned in some answers as some of the most important contacts. The Orkney Museum, in particular seems to have developed a close cooperation with TV and Radio stations. This also creates a clear idea for the museum of how it is marketing itself. Often this kind of contact depends on one or a few members of staff who have either prioritised this particular cooperation or who know about the business already. A smaller museum with an isolated location can certainly benefit enormously from these contacts and would ideally build most of its external communication through the contacts by letting location play a key part in self-promotion.

Staff and the use of volunteers naturally seem to be another key resource for many museums. Although it might seem obvious that the work of staff and volunteers have influence on how museums approach communication and learning, it might be the case in times when museums are pressed financially and are also perceived to be in a kind of communication and learning ‘void’. If a museum cannot mention a few key characteristics that make it unique in terms of communication and learning, then this question is completely dependent on how current staff and volunteers approach it - staff and volunteers therefore become key features in themselves (Groninger 2011; Moore

1994). Museums that already have strong and very particular communication resources seem to take a well-dedicated and well-integrated staff as a matter of course, perhaps because there will be well-established contacts or initiatives for staff to follow and build on. However, a museum with no concise contacts, initiatives or resources in terms of learning and communication can actually turn this to their advantage by creating a dedicated and well-integrated group of staff or volunteers. In times of financial difficulty, the use of volunteers can provide an entirely new outreach for a museum and can perhaps even put a new focus on current exhibition practices. Managing volunteers, of course, requires a lot of resources too and some museums do not have a tradition of engaging volunteers. There can be many challenges involved with the use of volunteers. However, people who spend their leisure time working in a museum often have a strong enthusiasm which the museum can benefit from - as Ruth Lambert from MOMA WALES puts it: *“Volunteer Gallery Attendants are our most important link with the public”*. This can, of course, be regarded as both an advantage and disadvantage, particularly if the use of volunteer work dominates that of professional staff. Many museum professionals began their career as volunteers and therefore may have had a different approach to their work than other volunteers (Groninger 2011). However, there seems to be no doubt that many museums take the opportunity of volunteer work to widen their contacts, encourage social interaction and engage in community life.

That leads to the final question about exhibition learning and communication practice:

QUESTION 3:

Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

Four of the museums that answered this question answered thusly:

The Fry Art Gallery, Essex - David Oelman, Vice Chairman/Trustee: *“We have a*

policy to engage with local groups especially schools”.

MOMA WALES - Ruth Lambert, Exhibitions Organiser: *“The Auditorium, Foyer, Green Room, Art Studio and Coffee Shop all play a part in engaging with community groups”.*

Leicester Museums and Galleries - Liz Wilson, Collections, Interpretation and Learning Manager: *“We work in partnership with schools and community groups to deliver nearly every new project or exhibition that we deliver”.*

Highland Folk Museum - Rachel Chisholm, Assistant Curator: *“We have worked with groups on specific projects”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Partnership:** *“We work in partnership with schools and community groups”, “worked with groups on specific projects”.*
- **Policies:** *“We have a policy to engage with local groups”.*

Discussion of answers: Most museums seem to refer to a direct policy or created partnership when answering this question. They rarely go into detail about what partnership or cooperation involved, yet they are clearly an integral part of museum work. Although some museums might have been more or less ‘forced’ into these partnerships and consider them a necessity, others have clearly used them as opportunities to reach out to visitor groups that rarely visit museums. Most of these partnerships involve schools and this also means exploring the national curriculum and indeed how schools can fit museum learning into their formal education:

“... as the lines between formal and informal learning become less clear, formal educational institutions have slowly begun to recognise the need to work alongside other, complementary learning environments such as museums. The challenge for museums is to grasp this role” (Black 2012: 79).

Some museums have created features in their exhibition practice with the direct purpose of engaging with community groups, like MOMA WALES: *“The Auditorium, Foyer, Green Room, Art Studio and Coffee Shop all play a part in engaging with community groups”.* However, engaging schools also requires a very close cooperation with social

and cultural values important to schools. This can appear to be more difficult but is nevertheless important if museums are to grasp the role of cultural interpreters in both formal and informal education; a school, teacher and a group of children have to feel the museum is engaging with their story, work or study. This is required to secure a long-lasting cooperation between institutions and people, and it is up to the museums to fit into this role and to make themselves irreplaceable as the closest ‘sparring partner’ for educational institutions. It is the museums that have to make their collections, exhibitions and events useful for community groups and schools, not the other way around. It seems like a closer description of this process is needed, although many museums already have established policies or partnerships.

The relationship between museums and communities is truly long-lasting as they have always been intertwined: *“The links between museums, heritage and community are so complex that it is hard to distinguish which one leads the other - does heritage construct the community or does a community construct heritage?”* (Crooke 2007: 1). Communities need heritage or experience in order to form and develop and museums need communities in order to express community identity and to recognise the value and purpose of museums. Studies into this relationship mostly revolve around the important aspects of these differences and similarities. In order for museums to engage with community groups these studies are more important than ever (Black 2010; Carbonell 2004; Crooke 2007; Simon 2010; Watson 2007).

Summary of Chapter 1

Theories of learning and communication have always been closely connected to theories of interpretation. Most museums base their exhibition learning on various learning and communication perspectives although often without being fully aware of it. Different learning and communication approaches often become clear when visiting museum exhibitions and quite often it is possible to see how a museum has approached these matters both practically and theoretically in exhibitions. Exhibitions have always been and continue to be ‘the mirror’ that reflects almost every learning and communication strategy that goes on in a museums. It is through exhibition practices that collections, objects, styles, learning, analyses, interpretation and presentation are made clear. It is also through exhibitions that museums conduct most of their communication with

visitors; a communication that very much reflects how a museum communicates internally, with its surrounding communities and with both past and present influences. There is much history to consider and relate to for the museum as an institution. Some have handled this better than others by embracing their traditional mind-sets whilst developing new ones to suit communication in the twenty-first century. The traditional historical communication approach can be seen as both a burden and an inspiration depending on the individual mind-set and approach of museums. Through both case studies and questionnaires we can gain a better understanding of how museums are thinking about their own learning and communication purposes.

There can be no doubt that museums, consciously or unconsciously, are very influenced by various learning and communication styles. This seems obvious in both their theoretical and practical approach to exhibition creation and development. Often museums seem to work according to specific policies or established procedures. However, there are certain elements in their exhibition approach that seem to be unknown to many museum professionals. As demonstrated in the questionnaire answers most museums have a policy or strategy for engaging with community groups, although it is rarely defined in the answers what these partnerships might involve. Also, most museums define staff and the use of volunteers as some of the most important resources for their learning and communication management. It can therefore seem very surprising that not many are able to identity a few core characteristics of what exactly it is that make them unique in terms of learning and communication. If a museum cannot name something that seem obvious to them, then at least they ought to take this into consideration, especially because many of them already use the term ‘unique’ or ‘special’ on their websites when talking about their learning facilities or collections. Many museums equally seem to be very keen to offer their visitors as varied a range of services and activities as possible. Although many strive in their own way to achieve this, it also seems to confuse many museums in their exhibition outcomes. Often there does not seem to be a particular learning or communication focus in exhibitions; sometimes it might ‘drown’ in too many different activities and services and quite often a lack of focus is put down to minimal financial resources or lack of staff.

Another interesting perspective that becomes clear through the questionnaire

answers is how the staff of smaller museums tends to work more ‘all-round’. When a museum is not big enough to have several separated departments dealing with their own area of expertise, staff members generally have to work with all aspects of exhibition, communication and learning. This somehow seems to generate a more open attitude towards communication and learning questions, perhaps because a stronger or wider sense of responsibility for all aspects of work is placed on fewer people. Also, working at the same museums for several decades naturally creates a strong sense of responsibility. These aspects are demonstrated by Exhibition Officer, Tom Muir, from The Orkney Museum in his final comment on the questionnaire: *“I am proud of this museum. I have worked here in various posts for the last 24 years and saw the museum expand and improve”* (Appendix 1.3).

Most museums do have a strong wish to engage with community groups or broaden their learning styles through closer partnerships and social interaction. In many ways, they just seem to lack the proper ‘tools’ or confidence to grasp their role as empowering learning and communication institutions of the twenty-first century. A great reluctance towards (or perhaps fear of) change or experimenting with new ways of interacting seems to be holding museums back from really grasping this role. This reluctance can be traced back to the contexts and circumstances in which museums’ originated and requires that we take a closer look at the evolution and philosophies that lay behind the original foundation of the museum as a cultural and communicative institution.

Chapter 2:

Museum Communication, History and Philosophy

Section 1: Defining Historical Developments

Introduction: Developing new Knowledge from History

As the definitions of communication and learning theories indicate, there has been a shift in thinking within museums themselves. The concept of communication has moved from being a linear process to a much more flexible and dynamic one. This requires a closer look at how museums see their own purpose and relevance in today's society.

This chapter covers two different sections. Section one considers those tendencies that can be analysed through historical developments and the creation of communicative thinking, which have taken place within museums over the past decades. This means taking a further look at the development of two main theoretical perspectives, Modernism and Postmodernism, and how these perspectives have shaped ways of thinking. Section two will engage further in discussions of how our understanding of museum communication, interpretation and interaction has been shaped by our historical understanding of modern and postmodern ways of thinking. It will also discuss how philosophical approaches and epistemological developments within museums have influenced one another and how these influences continue to shape our understanding of knowledge and interpretation.

When investigating the development of modernism and postmodernism within museum history, we have to look at the social movements and tendencies of past societies too. The way objects were collected, how actual exhibitions evolved and how knowledge was created from collections was very much influenced by the way society (and the world) was viewed and understood. This also means looking into ideological aspects of thought.

Foucault is a well-used source when identifying and analysing epistemological perspectives. He has, however, also been known to promote a somewhat negative view on museums as institutions that encourage learning - especially after having described the museum as a heterotopia (Foucault 1998; Heterotopian Studies: website; Lord 2006a: 1). This concept, when defined in terms of museums, leaves us with an

impression of museums as being negative and disturbing places where cultural development is suspended or neutralised. Foucault used the term *heterotopia* to describe spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships than other places. A heterotopia is a physical representation of a utopia or a type of parallel space that contains undesirable elements to make a real utopian space possible. A heterotopia can therefore be understood as a space of *otherness*, *difference* or *transformation* (Foucault 1998; Heterotopian Studies: website; Lord 2006a).

This idea of place as a heterotopic entity has been gaining attention in the current debate on postmodern theoretical discussion in social sciences. In *Different Spaces* (Foucault 1998) Foucault actually promotes a society with many heterotopias. Not just as an encouragement of difference, but also to promote spaces of new social developments.

Beth Lord, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Dundee, argues that Foucault did not paint a negative picture of museums through this description but rather formed a definition to state how museums can contribute to progress: “*When the museum is understood essentially as a heterotopia or space of difference, it becomes clear that the museum can perform Foucault’s own historical methodology of genealogy*” (Lord 2006a: 2).

Foucault understood progress as the growth of capabilities and not necessarily as a historical or cultural progress, nor as a progress working towards a specific goal or ideal. Growth of capabilities would define power relations and historical events as necessary for a given time and it is within this type of progress that museums can contribute (Foucault 1998; 2002; Lord 2006a).

The Modern and Postmodern Epistemes

Before discussing the museum as a heterotopia, a historical definition will be discussed. Foucault identified a set of different epistemes or historical periods with their own discourse for knowledge development. Foucault’s epistemological definitions are not directly linked to museology. Rather, they are viewed as acknowledgement spaces of a given time but therefore useful when identifying museological epistemology. What Foucault tried to establish was that the way people regarded and managed the first collections very much depended on how they regarded the world, society and

community around them (Findlen 2004: 23-36; Foucault 1972; 1998; 2002: 235-240; Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 15; Lord 2006a; Taylor 1987). He was especially interested in those principles that were viewed as *accepted* or *allowed* or could be *thought* at a specific time. Foucault believed it to be of great importance to understand these principles in order to identify and understand the social development of, for example, a museum and indeed how and why collections were managed the way they were. By an episteme, Foucault understood those techniques, codes, languages, cultures and values which shaped a culture. These principles of knowledge define what was regarded as 'acceptable thought' or as the *truth* at a specific moment in history. The first two historical epistemes Foucault mentions are the Renaissance and the Classical epistemes (Foucault 2002: 235-240; Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 12-16; Witcomb 2002). These two epistemes shaped the understanding of the following epistemological periods; the Modern and the Postmodern, which will be analysed in greater detail here. It is, however, important to understand the evolution from one episteme to another, as well as the logic by which thinking was shaped and developed into something quite new and sometimes consciously oppositional. As the main focus of this chapter is on modern and postmodern developments, I have chosen to concentrate primarily on the development of these two movements through Foucault's definitions, which are then applied to museum development.

Modern Developments

From the very beginning, museums have not only displayed objects, but also objects' relation to words and concepts. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, museums (or collections) sought to define how objects could be represented in a structural system of reason and sense. When museums defined this 'order of things' in their displays they also created an idea in which objects were necessarily interpreted through certain structures and principles. This definition is the core essence of the Enlightenment and has remained the foundation of museums throughout many of their historical transformations.

Although developed and defined over some centuries, it is from the beginning of the nineteenth century we begin to identify the consequences of a major shift in learning and thinking within the first collections. Many private collections opened to the public,

and for the first time it was possible for everyone to gain access to knowledge and new understandings. This was very much the premise behind modernism, which: *"... signals a dialectical opposition to what is not functionally "modern", namely "tradition"* (Eysteinnsson 1992: 8). This very simple definition also affected the scientific studies, which for the first time, made Man the centre of knowledge: *"...with the rejection of religious and monarchical authority comes a rejection of the idea that the universe has an essential or divine order"* (Lord 2005: 147). God is no longer the great creator of the world and Man defines his/her own history (Gordon 2001; Foucault 1972; 1984; 2002: 245-252; 2004; Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 185-188; Lord 2005).

"History was no longer a secure and fixed foundation but an uncomfortable abyss which had to be filled" (Olsen and Svestad: 1994: 7). This point of view shifted understandings of science and research. In some cases, historic and archaeological interpretations took a more nationalistic turn. History was, in general, used to state who you were and where you came from. However, questions like these required some very precise answers and the way to make history *speak* was through order, classification and indeed tradition: *"The Enlightenment recognizes, for the first time, that there is a gap - a space, if you will - between nature and the systems we use to order it. This space is the space of representation"* (Lord 2005: 147). This gave the first Enlightenment museums a great advantage; history became something that concerned everyone and the place to find answers was in museums. It also gave interpreters and scholars of history and archaeology a very powerful position in the process of social development. They could provide answers (sometimes with surprising clarity) about our origins through classification of historic objects, and by creating chronologies. People were introduced to historical objects almost as though they moved through a linear timeline; in Denmark a direct example of this was created by archaeologist Christian Jürgensen Thomsen who invented the so-called 'Three-Age System'. In 1816 Thomsen was appointed head of the Antiquarian Collections (later the National Museum of Denmark). Whilst organizing and classifying the artefacts for public display, he decided to present them according to the materials that they were made of; stone, bronze and iron. This approach changed how archaeology had been viewed up until then (Damm and Nielsen 1998).

Although this approach can seem very instructive today, it made it very easy and clear for people with little or no education to understand the past. The museum brought

different collections together and interpreted them according to systems of classification: *"It is the role of the museum in the eighteenth century not only to study and display objects, but to study and display these human systems for understanding objects"* (Lord 2005: 148). However, as many museums gradually discovered, it was almost impossible to add new analysis and interpretations to this very strict established chronology: *"During much of the twentieth century, many museums became divorced from the communities they were set up to serve. Others oriented themselves towards powerful social elites. Many museums became inwardly focused and introspective institutions that turned their backs on societies that no longer fully upheld the purposes for which museums had been founded"* (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 21). Hooper-Greenhill bases this criticism on the two main approaches to communication, the transmission model and the cultural model (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 15-19).

The transmission approach fit well into the modern museum and is still part of museum communication today because it views learning as part of 'an education' and as something external to the learner (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 15-16). As stated by the cultural approach, communication is a very broad process through which knowledge is transformed, analysed and interpreted. New perspectives might come from different sources, and the receiver can use this information as he/she prefers depending on prior knowledge, experiences and interests. From a communication point of view, these two models have outlined a very clear difference between modern and postmodern museum practices and between visitors: *"The use of communication theory has enabled us to understand how the transmission model positions 'receivers' as passive, and how the cultural model acknowledges that participants are active"* (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 19).

Foucault saw these modern tendencies as a natural and necessary development even if total order or classification could never actually be reached:

"... it is of little importance that these endeavours did not reach fulfilment or that they did not entirely accomplish the purpose that had brought them into being: they all expressed, on the visible surface of events or texts, the profound unity that the Classical age had established by positing the analysis of identities and differences, and the universal possibility of tabulated order, as the archaeological basis of knowledge" (Foucault 2002: 268).

These definitions of learning have to be considered in order to understand the

development of postmodernism. Hooper-Greenhill and Lord also argue that examples of the modern museum exhibition are still prevalent across large parts of Europe. Even though many museums today explicitly encourage visitors to consider how objects are related to other social or cultural concepts or if they might be interpreted differently, there is still a tendency to display objects in a modern style (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 21; Ingemann and Larsen 2005; Lord 2005: 154; Preziosi 2004). This is not an unusual understanding if we consider Foucault's definition of modern and postmodern development. In fact, this might be a natural development of modern and postmodern tendencies within museums.

Some museums are deliberately returning to modern representation approaches within their exhibitions. Lord analyses a few of these in the article *Representing Enlightenment Space*: “It has also been suggested that these exhibitions represent a reaction against the trend for exhibitions led by designers and educators: *Enlightenment displays return power to curators and restore objects as the essence of the museum*” (Lord 2005: 152). Lord suggests that a reason for recreating Enlightenment spaces is that the question of museum representation has become relevant again (Lord 2005: 153). As learning and experience become the main focus of museums' visitor communication, questions of how and why we represent objects and the contexts in which they are displayed become important: “*We are returning to the notion that the organizing principle behind museum display can be the theme, material or function of the objects as well as their chronology or geography*” (Lord 2005: 152). However, Lord also acknowledges the danger in representing a historical museum space like Enlightenment galleries; some visitors might not realise that they are entering a historical exhibition space and these spaces may reinforce their worst fears about what museums are: “*...long rooms of closely-packed shelves, eighteenth-century cabinets and marble busts, with little interpretation*” (Lord 2005: 154). No matter how museums are being viewed, they have always sought to be spaces of reflection and that tendency has developed even further with the concept of postmodernism.

Postmodern Developments

Foucault's definitions also revolve around the development of a postmodern episteme, which can be thought of as an extension of the Modern. It may, however, sometimes

seems to be in contrast with it. It has been widely discussed when exactly the ‘shift’ from modernism to postmodernism took place (if it can indeed be described as ‘a shift’). Some might consider the period after the Second World War as postmodern, and others might argue that the shift did not take place until the introduction of Social Constructivism (Eysteinnsson 1992; Foucault 1972; 2002: 257-270; Hein 1994: 73-79; Hooper-Greenhill 1995: 189-203; 1997). Postmodernism does indeed have a lot in common with constructivism: *“Constructivist learning theory points out that learning is both personal and social; meaning is mediated through interpretive communities. Meanings are in large part controlled by the validation accorded them by the relevant interpretive community”* (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 139). Constructivist theories are often viewed by museums as a postmodern way of interacting with visitors (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 67-72; 1995: 189-203; 1997). Museums have to understand learners and create a space where useful learning can take place (Foucault 2002: 375-387). In a postmodern approach, learning is a social activity. When we learn we are influenced by social circumstances - however, we are also affected by prior knowledge and experiences. It is therefore not possible to adapt new knowledge without prior knowledge and this is believed to be what motivates people to learn.

Postmodernism raises many new issues for museums, especially regarding their learning and communication practices. Museums have to provide possibilities for learning, which means that museums have to acknowledge visitors’ prior knowledge and experiences. They do not only have to recognise that people learn differently, they also have to make learning interesting and create suitable learning environments.

Processes of learning and meaning-making are also considered to be in constant change; not only do learners construct their own meanings, but museums and curators are viewed as enabling in this process. This has probably resulted in one of the greatest shifts in thinking for museums; from institutions where new knowledge was transmitted to visitors that were, more or less, passive, to places that foster motivating environments where social interaction can take place and develop (Hein 1998: 135-154; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 67-73; 1997; Lord 2006a; Macdonald 1992: 677-688; 1998; 2006).

Modernism ‘versus’ Postmodernism

Postmodernism clearly developed as a result of modern tendencies. In order to understand why this change in thinking has taken place within museums - and why it has been necessary - it is useful to take a closer look at some of the perspectives and issues it has influenced the most within museum communication:

1) Chronology - Storytelling

Creating a chronology was part of the entire foundation of knowledge in the modern episteme. It put knowledge in a specific order and made it easier to gain new information. Research and information gathering was put into classifications or ‘timelines’ that made them relevant and useful.

In a postmodern understanding there seems to be more focus on themes and stories of objects, research, interpretations, analysis, etc. It becomes easier to add your own knowledge and experience to historic objects and themes. In a postmodern exhibition visitors will have their own say in the meaning-making process - and museums will have to engage in dialogues with visitors, especially as part of their learning and communication strategies (Foucault 2002: 257-270; Lord 2006a; Hein 1998: 155-179).

2) Guidance and Instructive Learning - Visitor Interaction

Modernism seldom questions or tests new knowledge. Knowledge as it was presented by museums was believed to be ‘the truth’. Museums did the research, analysis and interpretation and presented ‘facts’ in their exhibitions. This approach was especially valued by behaviourists, who believed visitors’ creation of knowledge had to be stimulated by and was dependent on a teacher (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 73-79). Visitors were guided and instructed in their learning approach and, generally speaking, communication was one-way (Foucault 2002: 257-270; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 73-79; 1995: 260-275).

In the postmodern episteme, guidance has turned into a conversation that continues at many levels; conversations between audiences, societies and museum institutions. Museums are no longer the only party responsible for research and interpretation; history is expected to be part of an endless

discussion. We also see the rise of new academic disciplines created with the purpose of discussing these issues: *"In fact, we might even venture to say that Museology is, in many ways, the ultimate "postmodern" discipline"* (Duclos 1994: 4).

3) National focus - Global focus

In a modern approach, it was of utmost importance to study your own history. This was especially true during the nineteenth century when many historic writings had a nationalistic view of the past. This was partly because not much had been written down before, but mostly because the study of history was part of finding and defining your own origins.

Postmodernism is a very global way of thinking. Different cultures and traditions exist in the same societies and it has become possible to share the same values and beliefs without sharing the same nationality (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 105-109; Macdonald 1992; Sarker et al 2011).

4) Objectivity - Subjectivity

In the modern episteme, Man slowly became aware of his/her own role in the scientific research, which meant that exhibitions of culture and history were created in an 'objective' manner. This was reflected in the instructive learning styles; there was only one (or a few) answer(s) to questions concerning your own origin and history, and as a learner you accepted these answers as the truth: *"The closeness of "object" to "objective" and "objectify" reveals the tendency to regard the meanings with which objects may be imbued as emanating from their own physical existences. It is not so long since the truth of the objects was taken as a given within the museum"* (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 106).

In the postmodern episteme you question or challenge the role of the interpreter as well. Postmodern exhibitions do not aim to present one straight answer, they aim to open up other possibilities and views of thinking about topics and issues. This sometimes 'subjective' view that is taken by the museum in its exhibition communication does provide room for discussion and should provide a foundation for wider debate (Duclos 1994: 1-13; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 67-72;

2007a).

Although these points are chosen subjectively by me, most literature on modern and postmodern issues mention changes to the aforementioned subjects most frequently. This is most likely due to the fact that these are the perspectives within museum practice where changes are most 'measurable' or 'analyse-able' (Bennett 1995; 1996; Black 2005: 266-288; Duclos 1994: 2-4; Gaskell 2012a; 2012b; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 71, 99-104; 1997; 2000: 104-108, 124-140; 2007a; Lord 2006a; Mordhorst 2002: 1-2; Trigger 1989; Watson 2007: 80-82).

The shift from modern to postmodern thinking has meant a major shift in exhibition, learning and communication practices. New methods and theories on how to interact with visitors have been carried out; many museums constantly seek to find new ways of engaging, stimulating and challenging visitors. Although these new approaches might occasionally seem like they are deliberately moving away from the modern view, they still revolve around most of the same principles. This might seem natural since most of the knowledge and meaning-making used in postmodernism is founded in modernism. However, as the following sections will explore, the constant change and development of postmodern thinking also seem to create a new way of thinking about communication, learning and interaction within museum contexts. Most of these new understandings have roots in modernism as it developed during the Enlightenment, however, in order to be relevant to the twenty-first century they have to be communicative accessible in a totally new way.

Modernism seemed very certain and firm compared to the more fluid postmodern way of thinking, and today museums have to ask themselves questions like: *"What stories can be told about the past and the present, and who can legitimately tell them? How do we deal with artefacts collected at a time when language used about them was considered to be unproblematic, when now we see that what we say influences how they are seen? How do we enable people to use museums for self-development and self-empowerment and self-directed learning?"* (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 71). Questions like these are not only a result of postmodern thinking - they are also part of shaping new environments of learning and communicating within the museum space.

Section 2: Discussing Developments and Philosophy

The *different* Museum - the Museum as a Heterotopia

Foucault's description of the museum as a heterotopia created an interesting discussion about how the museum should be viewed as an interpreter and communicator. Lord has focused particularly on philosophical thinking and museums in her research and on how philosophy can help us to think about the nature, history, and future of museums. The following sections debate Foucault's definition with interpretations from Lord's understanding of his concept. It is my intention to form a kind of discussion between the two by analysing their perspectives and discussing these in an interview with Beth Lord (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1). Influences from other researchers will be included as well.

Foucault's characterisation of the museum is further defined in *Different Spaces*, and partly in *The Order of things* (Foucault 1998; 2002). However, in *Different Spaces*, Foucault is linking his definition of heterotopias directly to museums (Foucault 1998: 182). Foucault describes heterotopia as a space of difference where ordinary cultural emplacements are brought together: "*Museums and libraries are heterotopias in which time never ceases to pile up and perch on its own summit, whereas in the seventeenth century, and up to the end of the seventeenth century still, museums and libraries were the expression of an individual choice*" (Foucault 1998: 182). They are, in a sense, forbidden isolated places that set out to create a space of illusion and criticise all real spaces (Foucault 1998: 184).

The idea of heterotopia has been discussed in connection with museum studies before, however it is rarely discussed how or why the museum might be a heterotopia (Bennet 1995; 1996; Hetherington 2011; Lord 2005; 2006a; Norris 1994). Heterotopia is significant for several reasons: "*It is a significant concept because it has the potential to shift the definition of the museum away from objects and collections and towards difference*" (Lord 2006a: 3).

Foucault himself suggests two aspects that make the museum a heterotopia: a spatial aspect and a temporal aspect. Museums are places that bring different objects from different times together. In other words, museums seek to bring together a total

view of time. By doing so, the museum finds itself in a double paradox: “*it contains infinite time in a finite space, and it is both a space of time and a ‘timeless’ space. What makes it a heterotopia, then, appears to be threefold: its juxtaposition of temporally discontinuous objects, its attempt to present the totality of time, and its isolation, as an entire space, from normal temporal continuity*” (Lord 2006a: 3-4).

Foucault recognises that this definition is not always how museums have been characterised. In the seventeenth century museums were characterised by the choice of the individual. He argues that museums’ desire to simultaneously present objects from every era within an environment in which time stands still, is a product of modernism (Foucault 1998: 182; Lord 2006a: 3-7). Foucault argues that the characterisation of museums as *spaces of time* is limited to museums in the nineteenth century. Foucault defines the nineteenth century in his analysis of the epistemic shifts as the period when history, time and ideas of evolution became dominant ideas within museums. Museums exhibited objects as part of a historical timeline that could not be questioned or altered (Foucault 1972; 2002; Heterotopian Studies: website).

Today, most museums do not aim to accumulate all aspects of history or culture. Hooper-Greenhill even takes it as far as saying: “*The great collecting phase of museums is over*” (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 152) as she defines the ‘post-museum’. Many museums today seem to rely less on objects than they do on storytelling and experience. There will always exist differences between museums and collections, however, Foucault saw the aim of presenting time and history as a totality as a development that entirely depended on the future (Bursell 2004; Foucault 1998; Hetherington 2011; Jørgensen 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 2007a; Lord 2005; 2006a; Norris 1994). The idea about the museum’s relevance and purpose has changed over time, and that was how Foucault saw its development.

Lord argues that Foucault’s explanation of heterotopia fails to define what a museum really is and has been (Foucault 1998: 179; Lord 2006a: 5). To understand the museum as a heterotopia, it is important to consider the heterotopia literally as being a space of difference. The museum therefore does not just represent different objects but objects that are different from the conceptual orders in which they would normally be

understood: *“The museum is a heterotopia not because it contains different objects, nor because it contains or juxtaposes different times, but rather because it presents a more profound kind of difference: the difference between objects and concepts. What every museum displays, in one form or other, is the difference inherent in interpretation”* (Lord 2006a: 5). Lord defines interpretation as the relation between objects and the stories used to describe them. But, the relation will always involve gaps (Lord 2006a: 5).

Thus interpretation can be hidden and implicit. Museums might therefore not need texts or objects at all. However, interpretations are necessary in order to represent relations between objects and structures. It is interpretation that defines a museum, without it a building would just be a collection store, not a museum. Conceptually, a museum is made possible by the space between systems of thought and objects themselves. A museum defines the difference between objects and systems of thoughts: *“Positing and questioning the relationship between things and systems is interpretation. Museums are fundamentally about interpretation - about attempting to bridge the gap between things and systems”* (Lord 2005: 148).

In the museum, interpretation and representation are connected. Lord sees the space of representation as the heterotopias. Interpretation is the way objects are explained and representation is the space between objects and the ways of conceptualizing them (Lord 2006a: 5). Lord acknowledges that most museums will probably want to keep focus on objects alone:

“I think this is an area where people who work in museums would usually want to insist that museums are about objects. And they are about the authenticity about objects - and they are very object-focused for very understandable reasons. I wouldn’t want to deny that the authentic object has a place in the museum and it’s part of what distinguishes museums from other kinds of exhibit activities. However, I would like to suggest that it is possible to imagine museums that don’t actually have objects in them. That is just about the concept of objects and the relationship of objects. You can see that for instance in the web based exhibitions. For example Neil MacGregor’s “A History of the World in 100 Objects”... obviously that is based on some real objects that really exist in the British Museum but the website on its own could function as a kind of museum without the visitors calling on the museum” (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1).

Lord believes that when a conceptual system or context is regarded as reason or fact, a gap occurs between the concept and the object, the world and the mind (Lord

2006a: 5-6). It is possible to spot this gap in the intellectual development of the seventeenth century (Foucault 2002). Prior to this period when God was considered creator of the universe and history was presented as a totality that no one questioned, it was difficult to perceive this gap. Meaning that in Foucault's modern episteme, the gap between words and objects could not be fully closed. However, gradually during the seventeenth century, representation begins to occur in all aspects of knowledge and it transformed beliefs. Essentially, museums today can therefore be regarded as postmodern, not in spite of their roots in Enlightenment, but because of their Enlightenment past (Lord 2006a: 3). Lord concludes that museums are fundamentally not about objects but about representation. Therefore any institution that operates as a space of representation is a museum.

The way that we understand the museum as a place of representation has developed from the ways in which we understand it as a heterotopia: "*The museum is a space of difference not only in the spatial sense of bringing different objects together, but primarily in the sense of the difference inherent in its content*" (Lord 2006a: 7). Being a place of representation also means being a place of difference. Foucault's definition of the museum as a heterotopia views the museum as an experience of the gap between objects and the order of concepts and cultures in which they are being interpreted.

Postmodern Development of the *different* Museum

When museums are defined as spaces of representation, their Enlightenment origins are clear. Lord states that museums are indeed institutions developed through the Enlightenment but that does not mean that museums manifest ideas or concepts limited to this period (Lord 2006a: 7).

Foucault actually believed that the museum as a space of difference was capable of performing a critique of its own historical development and relevance, which fits into his later definition of postmodernist thinking (Foucault 1972; 1998; 2002; Lord 2006a). Lord believes it is on the basis of their Enlightenment origins that museums are able to perform this critique. Just because museums are institutions of the Enlightenment does not mean that they cannot be considered as postmodern or indeed develop as postmodern institutions (Lord 2006a: 7-8).

The postmodern museum was not set up in opposition to the modern museum, but rather as a natural development. Foucault never presents any sort of opposition between Enlightenment and postmodernist concepts, especially because he describes all postmodernist concepts as being subject to critique (Foucault 1998; 2002; Heterotopian Studies: website). However, postmodernism is historically determined and defined by the Enlightenment, and the ability to critique and question well-established standards was based on the philosophical attitude of Enlightenment. According to Lord, we already see examples of critique being raised within museum spaces:

“I think, in these kinds of self-reflective moments, museums have that already really. When museums are thinking about “What is a museum?”. And is not just looking at how do museum curators deal with objects but actually deal with what is the purpose and function of museums: “Why do we have museums at all? What could museums become in the future?”. I suppose, in that article on Foucault, I was trying to get at the notion that museums have always been Enlightenment institutions and therefore already internalize that kind of question fundamental to the Enlightenment. One of the questions is the ability to critique one’s own roots. Even if a museum doesn’t have a self-reflective moment that question is still in it as an institution of interpretation. And thinking about how we connect concepts and objects together. There’s always the possibility that those can be connected differently or not at all. So I think that potentiality it’s always there even at the most traditional, boring museums I think it’s always there” (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1).

Lord believes that this has changed in museums over the past ten to twenty years. As more and more museums employ staff with museological backgrounds, they seem to be more open to these types of questions:

“If we look at my other favourite example, Kelvingrove; the way that has transformed itself into an institution that’s very open and very open to change. The new layout was designed in order to incorporate change because they decided that an exhibition should have a time limit of about 25 years. We don’t want to reinvent museums every 25 years so what they did was to build the potentiality for change into all of the different rooms and all the different cases and so on. So they could be refreshed fairly often. It’s an interesting approach to it; it’s about allowing objects to adapt” (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1).

This can also be seen through genealogy. Foucault believed genealogy to be achieved through archaeology as a method (Foucault 1972). He formed a definition of *general history* instead of *total history* (Lord 2006a: 9-11). Where *total history* sought to define a complete picture of human history and form sets of structures for it, *general history* determines forms of relation described between different principles and series. It

can be argued that one of the core aims of museums is to work towards representing a *total history* - at least for many national museums. However, Lord argues that all museums display a core aspect of interpretation: “*the difference between words and things*” (Lord 2006a: 9). Even museums that aim to organise their collections according to the idea of a *total history* have to interpret their objects in terms of their policies, structures and visions.

Based upon this background, Foucault describes heterotopias as being disturbing because they undermine the relations between words and objects and thus become spaces of the difference of words and objects (Foucault 1998; 2002; Lord 2006a). Objects and words are placed in different contexts within the museum space and fragments of different historical structures are used to set the frame. Museums are spaces of representation because they display problems of relating words and objects and by doing so they form a discursive analysis (Lord 2006a: 11).

Lord also suggests that museums have the capacity to reveal that set structures and political orders can be reversible and subject to change. This is simply because the museum is a heterotopia with roots in the Enlightenment. The museum embodies the capability of stating critique and progress simultaneously and it therefore also has the ability to overcome critiques of interpretive and communicative progress (Lord 2006a: 11).

Foucault describes the museums of today as a product of the Enlightenment and Lord finds this definition useful because it overcomes the problems of defining museums according to their objects alone (Foucault 1972; 1998; 2002; Lord 2005; 2006a). Instead, it offers an explanation on how museums can be progressive and enable the growth of capabilities. As places of difference, museums become places of critique, progress, transgress and contest, etc. This also makes the museum a perfect place to undertake a discourse analysis: “*Because the museum is a space of representation, because it puts on display the problem of relating words and things, the museum ‘undermines languages’ and performs a kind of discursive analysis*” (Lord 2006a: 10). When a museum displays systems of representation and interpretation through a discourse analysis it can reveal the underlying rules that bind words and things together.

Museums and Interpretation

Through Foucault's epistemological definitions it is possible to gain a view of how museums developed and how important their roots in the Enlightenment have been for their modern and postmodern developments. Museums today are often called 'postmodern' because they base much of their promotion on so-called 'postmodern analysis' and 'self-reflection'. However, the nature and purpose of museums has never been adequately defined: *"Alongside the history of the museum lies a history of philosophies of space and time, interpretation and value, nature and art, and subject and object that have affected and been affected by the museum's development, and that can help us to think about the nature, purpose, and potential of the museum"*. (Lord 2006b: 80). It can therefore seem surprising that very little research has been conducted on the areas between museums and philosophical thinking. In his articles *Museums and Philosophy* (Gaskell 2012a; 2012b: website), Professor of Cultural History and Museum Studies at the Bard Graduate Center in New York, Ivan Gaskell, offers discussions of philosophical issues concerning museums. Under headings as varied as *cultural variety*, *taxonomy*, *epistemology*, *ethics* and *aesthetics* he discusses why philosophers should be interested in museums and how museums can contribute to philosophical thinking (Gaskell 2012a; 2012b: website). Gaskell argues that everyone affected by museums could benefit from philosophical attention - although museums seem to have made this difficult: *"Perhaps in the 19th century museums were too self-evident as sites of scholarship to attract philosophical attention, whereas in the 20th and beyond their precipitate fall from epistemological grace has rendered them irrelevant. Nonetheless, they continue to present philosophical challenges beyond those to do with cultural variety, taxonomy, and epistemology"* (Gaskell 2012a: website).

During the first decade of the new millennium, many museums developed a trend towards minimal or no interpretation of objects (Lord 2005; 2006b). Museums sought to inspire reflection through this approach, as well as encourage diverse visitor responses. Minimal or no interpretation also served the 'learning agenda' well by emphasizing individual thinking; visitors were left alone with the objects and their personal reflection. Some museums have literally sought to find a more postmodern representation and self-reflecting learning approach by returning to parts of the Enlightenment approach (Lord 2005).

Seen from a philosophical learning point of view, this particular approach can encourage individual thinking and self-reflection in visitors. However, the lack of interpretation, on the part of the museum, can actually have the exact opposite effect of what is intended: *“the lack of interpretation can leave visitors frustrated at the lack of authoritative information about the objects, or bewildered about what they are supposed to learn from the display”* (Lord 2006b: 80). Some of the museums that have embarked on this exhibition approach are not displaying objects chronologically, as were often the case in the eighteenth and nineteenth century or after a specific theme either: *“Of course in art galleries that has been the case forever. Usually there is no interpretation at all or very little. And that is still more or less the case in many places”* (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1). Lord mentions that this trend worries her because it can disable interpretation:

“You get galleries now that are highly aesthetic; they are all about the beautiful arrangement of objects. They are deliberately moving away from proving texture and interpretation and so on. They have good motives in doing that because they want people to just have an experience of the objects. I find it quite problematic because it sort of turn the museum into a place of just beautiful objects rather than a place of interpretation. Sometimes in the name of greater diversity or in the name of greater access museums might actually be preventing interpretation from happening because they say: “We don’t want to impose a curatorial voice - we just want people to come and make whatever connection they make”. Then the problem is that people don’t make any connection, they don’t know what they are supposed to do (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1).

There are, however, some interesting museological reasons for taking a minimalist approach to interpretation. Since the exhibitions do not identify or illustrate the context of objects, it is possible for visitors to generate their own individual interpretations of the objects and the connection between them. This direction of no-interpretation can be seen as a new way of developing or ‘renewing’ modern thinking in a postmodern context. When visitors are left with their own personal views, every interpretation must be considered as valued and relevant. If the museum recognises this in the process it also allows for reflection on its own historical position and relevance in interpreting various cultures. This trend can also be considered as ‘pure’ encounters with objects: *“Without interpretation, the visitor can have an immediate encounter with the object, an encounter that supposedly allows the object to reveal itself and its meaning on its own terms”* (Lord 2006b: 82).

Lord argues that neither of these two views is of use to a postmodern museum (Lord 2006b: 82-83). Postmodernism is not simply advocating that all interpretation is valued nor does modernism state that all objects have an essential meaning that will be revealed to the visitor during a visit. Objects have no defining meaning although museums have always struggled against this belief. Instead: “... *it is this question of where meaning lies - rather than the answer - that is at the heart of the definition of the museum*” (Lord 2006b: 83).

Lord believes that rather than analysing modern or postmodern museum approaches it is more productive to view interpretation as an expression of what a museum fundamentally is. Museums have begun to encourage reflection and diversity as part of their historical role in shaping cultures. This is not a turn towards postmodernism; it is rather because museums are and have always been spaces for diverse views and reflection (Lord 2006b: 83). Museums are not displaying objects in a ‘non-interpretive’ way with no texts or labels or interactive elements as part of a return to Enlightenment values either. But simply because museums are spaces where the value and meaning of interpretation are challenged: “*Minimal interpretation is the current manifestation of the fact that museums are both postmodern spaces of pluralism and self-reflection, and Enlightenment spaces for contesting the interpretation of things*” (Lord 2006b: 83). Interpretation approaches or trends have and will always change. The tendencies towards minimal interpretation at some museums can therefore tell us more about how museums regard their role as interpreters.

Fundamentally, what all museums focus on is the same question that inspires modern philosophy: “*What is the relation between concepts and things?*” (Lord 2006b: 83). Lord argues that despite the standard definitions of a museum as they are stated by organisations like ICOM or the Museums Association, museums are not fundamentally about objects (Lord 2006b: 83). There is a philosophical issue more fundamental to the definition of a museum: the problem of how things are related to concepts: “*In the museum, there is a space between an image or object and its label, between a narrator and their audience, and between history and our imagination*”... “*In the museum at its most intimate, in the space between artefact and label, there is an imaginative translation taking place in each viewer’s mind*” (Fraser and Coulson 2012: 223).

During parts of modernist thinking this question was not a problem; God was the

creator of the universe and the question of how concepts and things related to each other did not exist. However, once Man began to create his own view of the world the question arises, as does the gap between concepts and things and between mind and world. This gap cannot be closed but it can be bridged by representation.

The problem of representation characterizes Enlightenment thinking, and according to Lord, it also informs the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Lord 2006b: 83-84). Museums and philosophy today are still operating in the philosophical thinking created by the Enlightenment, therefore we have to view classification, categorisation and interpretation as attempts to bridge the gap between concepts and objects. This suggests that philosophy helps to understand what a museum is, but also that a museum can help us to think philosophically:

“...that’s why they continue to change. That’s why they continue to find ways to tell the same old story really. If you think about the difference between a museum and a symphony orchestra; Symphony orchestras interpret the music but are basically doing the same thing that was done 300 years ago in terms of presenting the score - whereas museums have the same raw ingredients but are able to be very varied. So sometimes these kinds of notions are deeply engraved in our consciousness” (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1).

Museums are both spaces of representation, and difference simultaneously. They represent and maintain the gap between concepts and objects, and also provide new settings for visitors to consider these gaps. However, these systems of representation that Lord argues, bridge the gap between concepts and things, are not allowed to stand in Foucault’s definition of the museum as a heterotopia. When we understand the museum as a heterotopia, we also have to consider the ‘disorder’ and lack of representation. In the heterotopia, elements of different series emerge and cannot be arranged according to a governing principle or order. This makes it impossible to define a common order. However, Lord also believes that as museums put systems of representation on display and allow those systems to be challenged and contested, the museum has potential to reveal the discontinuity of the order of things: *“Museums are spaces of the difference of words and things. It is within this space of difference that systems of representation can be revealed and contested”* (Lord 2006b: 85).

Summary of Chapter 2

Museums have always been places for displaying systems of representation and for maintaining that gap between concepts and objects that cannot be totally bridged. Lord believes that this makes the museum a perfect space for posing the philosophical problem of the Enlightenment, the problems of representation, and also a space for attempting postmodern theory and approaches (Lord 2006b: 86). Even if this has always been the case, it has become more explicit than ever as museums openly encourage diversity with regards to interpretation.

Considering Foucault's suggestion of the museum as a heterotopia and Lord's definition of the problems of interpreting and representing the gap between concepts and things, it becomes clear that museums as places of difference will always be philosophical spaces. The development of philosophical thinking has been affected by the museum's development too. Therefore thinking about the museum as a philosophical place might actually help us to think about the purpose and potential of a museum too.

This is not a new discussion; museums have always had to discuss and argue over purpose: *"But many museums today seem torn in all directions and unable to define for themselves why they are here, let alone broadcast this to their potential audiences. Lack of certainty of purpose can only bode ill for future survival"* (Black 2012: 4). Black believes this is partly due to cuts in funding and resources, and also because museums are challenged by the public to constantly demonstrate their potential through new features (Black 2012: 5). As a consequence, many museum professionals themselves are in doubt about the purpose of the museum.

Despite a current lack of finances and existing in rapidly changing societies, museums must accept the need for change in order to represent and respond to the society in which they exist: *"... a big challenge for a profession that is notoriously resistant to change"* (Black 2012: 8). Here Black addresses the biggest problem museums face today; their own reluctant attitude towards change. It can be argued that this reluctance has its roots in modern thinking and was created during a time in which we did not question the relevance or purpose of our 'teachers', yet many museums today still consider change a challenge and not a possibility. There can be different

ways of approaching this problem. As this chapter has discussed, philosophical thinking can encourage museums to explore their own potential and purpose even further. Lord mentions, that this process has already started at some museums and that we see it in exhibitions that explore the work of museums and directly ask: “*What is a museum?*” (Beth Lord; Appendix 2.1). This approach and an increasing openness towards these questions might be the result of new educations in museum and gallery studies, heritage management or culture studies.

As explored in the discourse analysis, philosophical theories can be useful ‘tools’ when conducting practical analyses of museums’ own communication and learning perspectives. We also see philosophical and theoretical tendencies in the historical development of museums, which is not strange considering that the ideas behind museums are closely connected to those of philosophical thinking. Theories are rarely useful if they cannot be organised into something relevant and practical. However, I do believe the need for theoretical and philosophical analyses that can help museums reconsider their practical values and priorities are greater than ever.

Chapter 3:

Museum Communication and Exhibition Practice

Section 1: Exhibition Theories and Approaches

Introduction: The Exhibition Space

“Communication within a museum potentially encompasses all of an institution’s practice which make meaning - from the pragmatic effect of whether or not there is an admission charge (which makes meanings about what the institution is and who may enter it), to the overall aesthetic impact of the building, to the organisational layout of the galleries, to the written texts pasted on walls or written in brochures which support exhibitions” (Ravelli 2006: 1).

Associate professor at the University of New South Wales, Louise Ravelli, gives this distinct definition of what communication encompasses for both staff and visitors.

Although communication often starts before visitors even enter the museum building, it is usually at the actual building that the personal communication begins. The museum has a unique opportunity to influence visitor experiences through everything from architecture to texts, learning facilities, cafés and clean toilets. Although museums nowadays have opportunities to apply their communication to many different elements, particularly online and outside the building in local communities, exhibitions and galleries still seem to be the main communication space (Crow and Din 2009;

Dillenburg 2011: website; Macleod 2005; Macleod et al. 2012). Many museums hold on to this approach because it requires visitors to come to the museum and see the collections in person. It also requires that a lot of effort is put into exhibitions: *“A museum exhibition can, I suggest, be regarded as a ‘technology of imagination’. It is an ordered site where the sensory and the cognitive are brought together; and where, through experience, visitors may extend and reinforce or reshape their knowledges”* (Macdonald 1994: 269).

The first section of this chapter will explore different theoretical exhibition settings and ways of communicating within the exhibition space by looking at some of the most used exhibition theories. Visitor developments and needs in both present and future museum exhibitions will be explored too. Practical examples of how museums have implemented new communication strategies or have approached new technologies will be described throughout the first section. Section 2 of the chapter will explore two

case studies on how museums are implementing exhibition theories within their museum spaces. Finally, section 3 will analyse another three questions from the questionnaire about the museums' exhibition practice.

Although museums visitors cannot be seen as passive, the museum exhibition itself is in many ways a 'passive' medium. Only recently have some museums begun to renew or update exhibitions after they have opened. However, exhibitions can open up new ways of approaching knowledge. This requires taking a closer look at visitors and their different characteristics.

Defining Visitors

Studies of visitors and their behaviours and needs have gained more and more attention during recent years. The constant dialogue between visitors and museums means museums have to consider participation and interaction much more than before. Many factors influence how and why visitors pay attention to specific exhibition elements; perhaps today more than ever as the use of social media and technology has become essential parts of exhibition design as well. To become engaged and captured by objects, themes or exhibitions do not just require a thorough understanding of visitor behaviour but also an essential understanding of how visitors are motivated and inspired to learn, engage and interact.

It has always been a challenge to attract visitors' attention. However, theories and definitions on visitor attention and behaviour have been very varied and for a long time undefined (Bitgood 2013: 17). The study of visitors' behaviour has been a long-term research question with many different approaches; as early as 1916, Secretary of Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Benjamin Gilman discussed the issue of "*fatigue*" as a result of poor exhibition design. He came up with very detailed descriptions of observations made of visitors in exhibitions with photo documentation defining the use of glass cases (Gilman 1916: 67-74). His observations motivated further research into visitor attention and the use of exhibition spaces. Firstly, through the work of Edward Robinson in 1928 which further discussed issues of museum fatigue, and later in 1935 when Arthur Melton expanded on Robinson's work by including issues related to "*object competition*" and "*gallery density*" (Bitgood 2013: 21-30). These were some of

the first theories to discuss aspects of psychological visitor behaviour and responses to exhibition settings. Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Jacksonville State University, Stephen Bitgood believes the early studies to be important partly because they identify essential terms still used in visitor studies today, and partly because they were the first attempts at empirical visitor studies (Bitgood 2013: 21-22).

Today's visitor studies concentrates on more specific definitions of visitor groups and segmentations, as well as the actual interaction with audiences. This is reflected in the constant attempt of linking visitor theories and studies to visitor practices. In 2010 Bitgood defined what he called "*an attention-value model*" (Bitgood 2010: 3) as part of a comprehensive visitor attention definition. This model seeks to incorporate museum research findings for the past eighty years as well as contemporary research in psychology. Bitgood identifies two essential issues in the model. Firstly, he states that attention is a three-level continuum: capture, focus and engage - each with different variables influencing attention. Secondly, he believes the primary motivation for paying attention is perceived value in terms of time spend and satisfaction with an exhibition experience (Bitgood 2010: 3-4). Bitgood considers 'attention' in the broadest possible way by focusing on visitors' behaviours (such as engagement, viewing, reading etc.), aspects that may change visitors' attention in an exhibition, and individual experiences (such as searching, memories, finding meaning etc.).

According to Black, visitors are motivated to make museum visits by many different factors; the social factor plays a particularly important part (Black 2005: 28-30). Whether visiting as part of a family or study group, motivation will be shaped by factors as varied as interests (particularly interests of children), experiences, learning, entertainment and trends. The psychology behind this is determined by visitors' mental as well as physical states. Just as the exhibition design, setting and outline can motivate, inspire and stimulate a decrease or increase of attention (Bitgood 2000; 2013).

In 2008, Arts Council England established thirteen segments defining visitor motivation and needs (Arts Council England 2011: 6). The segmentation of visitors provides insight into why and how different kinds of visitors engage with arts and culture. The thirteen segments identified visitor groups as varied as the highly engaged

and well-motivated visitors, visitors with some engagement, and even non-visitors who would normally not go to museums and galleries at all. The National Trust identified seven different visitor profiles in 2004, which seek to identify visitors groups, and how visitors behave when being part of these groups (Black 2012: 32). These two programmes identify visitor motivation and needs through audience research and by including demographic factors as well as building on the psychology behind motivational behaviours and attitudes (Arts Council England 2011; Black 2012: 32). It is clear that expectations and needs of informal visitors are rising, as the lines between for example formal and informal learning seem to fade as well. Identifying visitor segments and their motivations and needs through their levels of curiosity, factual and scientific interests, level of prioritising children's' needs, level of seeking entertainment experiences etc., therefore becomes essential for establishing central visitor profiles: *"Our visitors want to use museums as they want, not as we dictate - and what they want are experiences they can tailor to their individual requirements"* (Black 2012: 68). Museums have to support visitors in seeking their individual requirements by encouraging engagement with content, objects and themes.

Most postmodern museums have an idea about who their target audience is. However, even after having identified a specific visitor segmentation it is important for museums to notice that visitor needs and expectations change rapidly. It is therefore useful to consider what visitors might need and expect in ten, twenty or even fifty years' time. This is a very important part of identifying the future perspectives and definitions of visitor and communication studies as well. Black describes how each generation can be associated with different sets of interests, lifestyles and values - yet, a new generation will always be partly shaped by the previous generation and by the society they grow up in (Black 2012: 35-37). He describes general characteristics of US audiences through the categorisation of different generations. These characteristics are likely to apply to worldwide audiences:

Silent/mature generation: Born between 1927 and 1945. This generation is raised in the era of Depression. General assumptions include that sacrifice is a virtue and that leisure time and retirement are rewards for years of hard work.

Baby Boomers generation: Born between 1946 and 1964. Increased the birth rate by 30% over the previous generation and thereby helped fuel growth of suburbia. This generation also witnessed an enormous growth of mass media. They were shaped by the social and financial upheaval of the sixties and seventies.

Generation X: Born between 1965 and 1978. After the introduction of the birth control pill this generation became smaller than the previous. Family structures also changed and more people experienced divorce. However, this generation's women were more likely to complete a higher education, which also influenced how family structures operated.

Generation Y: Born around 1979. These are the children of the Baby Boomer generation who have put off having children longer than previous generations. It is a very diverse generation where ethnic diversity was greater than before. This generation has a different way to filter the world around them because of the internet and especially social networking sites.

Generation M: Born in the mid-1990s. A generation immersed in a world of media and gadgets. They expect to be able to share information in multiple devices in multiple places. Technology is mobile for this generation and the internet plays a special role (Black 2012: 35-37).

Black also describes how the Center for the Future of Museums (website) and the Smithsonian Institute have pinpointed key trends for future museum visitors (Black 2012: 37). These trends are likely to influence who goes to museums in the future, by what they will be influenced and what they will seek:

- People will generally live longer; there will be a growing number of older people who need access to museum buildings.
- People will generally be higher educated and less likely to accept a passive role when visiting museums.
- Generation X will seek increasing opportunities for social interaction.
- The population is likely to continue to become more diverse; people will come from many different backgrounds and cultures.
- People will become more tolerant on social issues such as race, homosexuality and immigration.

- Family responsibilities will be increasingly shared and therefore family-focused programmes will be needed.
- Use of technology will increase, especially among the young.
- The internet will become more and more about social networking.
- The social experience of museum visiting will be more important than before. People will also be looking for experimental and participative experiences.
- There will be more options for how people, especially younger people, gather and spend their leisure time (Black 2012: 37).

These key trends are all likely to be true. However, there will always be unpredicted influences that can be difficult to do anything about and which might influence social behaviour and psychology in visitors. These influences may be minor - yet their consequences can be vast - or they may be major and influence the perspectives of a whole generation:

“As the global economic crisis arrived on the scene one day in October 2007, the youngest members of Generation Y continued their education and acquired the skills we always had been told would enable us to fulfil our dreams. All the opportunities we thought we were born with disappeared at a stroke, and today our generation, prepared for adulation, stands as the worried unemployed amid endless stacks of job applications” (Amiri 2012: website).

This is how student at N. Zahle’s Secondary School in Copenhagen, Aqbal Amiri (born in 1993), has experienced the financial crisis. A crisis that has also had a massive influence on museums all over the world as funding has either stopped or significantly decreased and staff numbers have been cut.

Although we do not yet know the full consequences of the financial crisis, we do know that museums have already been vastly influenced by it. Not just economically, but also through a change in visitor behaviour; when money is scarce, leisure activities such as visiting museums may be more or less prioritised thus creating either a decrease or increase in visitor numbers. However, we also see an increase in the use of technology and this is likely to continue at an even faster pace. Generation Y and M have been used to communicating through mobile technology all of their lives and feel

very uncomfortable if they cannot use this technology. Change (in communication technology) is normal and comfortable for these generations. Equally, change in social interactions will influence how visitors use museums in the future: *“Museums must grow and change with their audiences. They must demonstrate their relevance to people’s lives in the twenty-first century, and they must enable both social interaction and participative engagement with collections”* (Black 2012: 39).

Social interaction has changed immensely since museums became aware of how important this factor was for the overall museum experience. Executive Director of The Museum of Art & History in Santa Cruz, California, Nina Simon who is also the principal of Museum 2.0, sees the evolution of the visitor experience from personal to communal interactions via five stages of interface between visitor and museum. Beginning with stage 1 moving upwards:

- STAGE 5** Individuals engage with each other socially
- STAGE 4** Individual interactions are networked for social use
- STAGE 3** Individual interactions are networked in aggregate
- STAGE 2** Individuals interact with content
- STAGE 1** Individuals consumes content (Simon 2010: 26).

As we move up from stage 1 to stage 5, we move from a ‘ME-orientated’ focus to a ‘WE-orientated’ focus. Each stage has something special to offer visitors: Stage 1 provides visitors with access to content; stage 2 offers an opportunity for enquiry and to ask questions; stage 3 lets visitors see how their own interests fit in the wider community of visitors; stage 4 help visitors to connect with particular people; staff or other visitors who share their interests; stage 5 makes the entire institution feel like a social place full of encounters with other people (Simon 2010: 26-27). It is not possible to constantly design exhibitions for a stage 5 experience without going through stages 1-4. Also, some people might not be comfortable moving beyond stage 3. Each stage affords different experiences and most visitors will experience different stages within a given exhibition (Simon 2010: 26-27).

These generation characteristics and stages of social interaction give us an idea about how people might use and react to a museum exhibition (Jensen 1994). Different aspects of upbringing, use of new technology, community developments and various social approaches will all influence how museums communicate with visitors of all ages and cultures. However, museums often try to identify a particular target audience and define specific visitor experiences in their exhibitions - this requires taking a further look at visitors within the museum space.

Defining Visitor Experiences within the Museum Space

Many museums already consider various learning and communication styles when planning their exhibition and learning programmes. Their approach can be very different depending on how they regard visitors and the role visitors play. There have been various attempts to categorise visitors within the exhibition space, some of which can provide a clearer image of how museums view visitors. According to sociologist at the Smithsonian Institute, Zahava Doering, museums tend to hold three different attitudes towards their visitors: they either look at them as *Strangers*, *Guests* or *Clients* (Doering 1999: 127). The difference between the three is quite distinct. When a museum regards its visitors as *strangers* they believe that their main responsibility is to their collections and objects; in the worst cases museums regard their visitors as 'intruders'. When visitors are viewed as *guests* they are acknowledged in the exhibition spaces; they might be regarded as students that have to be educated by the museum. *Clients*, however, seem to be able to have their own say in the exhibition. The museum does not seek to impose a specific experience or knowledge but allows room for clients to draw upon their own experiences, memories and thoughts (Doering 1999: 130-135). Most exhibitions will hold elements of all three attitudes and curators might also aim to include one particular attitude more than others.

Through interviews, surveys and analysis of visitor comments, Doering also identified four different museum experiences that visitors (sometimes unintentionally) draw their experiences from (Bedford 2001; Birknell and Farmelo 1993; Black and Phelps 2002; Doering 1999: 136-142; Gunther 1994; O'Neill 2002; Tilley 1994; Wenger 2002).

- 1) **Social Experiences.** In a social experience, visitors mainly spend time with family and friends. Visitors choose to interact with others to create a satisfying learning and communication experience.
- 2) **Object Experiences.** Often museums can create a stunning effect by presenting original objects or a very rare object. This will mostly involve putting a lot of attention on a few particular object(s). These types of exhibitions might create a very object-oriented experience and focus on highlights.
- 3) **Cognitive Experiences.** Doering believed this type of experience to be of most satisfaction to *clients*. A cognitive experience will provide an opportunity to gain new knowledge or experiences and also get time and space to reflect on meanings created within the exhibition. A cognitive experience will often allow visitors to participate actively in the exhibition and encourage reflection through interaction.
- 4) **Introspective Experiences.** An introspective experience will allow visitors to imagine different times or places within an exhibition. It might be possible to feel a sense of belonging or perhaps visitors will recall specific memories. Often introspective experiences are very individual experiences, since most feelings and memories are private. However, this does not necessarily mean that visitors will not be willing to share them (Doering 1999: 136-142; Fleming 2005; Hein 1998; Rebora 1994; Wenger 2002).

Jem Fraser who led the Master plan for the £46.4 million National Museum Project in Edinburgh considers this interaction between visitors and exhibitions further by describing the museum visit as a drama with visitors in a leading role - sometimes as audience and sometimes as performers: “*Visitors are active in their choices throughout their visit and their meaning-making is influenced, but not wholly determined, by how well the museum drama works for them*” (Fraser 2007: 291). This drama can engage visitors’ emotions and imagination in a way that may ensure both intellectual and

psychological growth: “*This word meaning embraces more than learning in its narrow sense - meaning is about the impact the visit has on people’s lives - their memories, feelings, values, sense of wonder - and the overall impact on them of the experience of the particular place, object or set of objects*” (Fraser 2007: 292). Fraser created a new model based on the museum visit as a drama consisting of four different components:

- 1) **Identity.** One of the key influences of meaning-making is to create a personal connection between visitors and the exhibition. Visitors tend to feel attached to objects they find familiar, and try to make sense of other objects through these feelings.
- 2) **Transaction.** Transaction describes “*the mechanism of how visitors relate to the displays and to the museum environment*” (Fraser 2007: 294). Both objects and buildings contain very significant meanings and may create very specific associations and feelings. Transaction is related to the way themes, emotions and objects are communicated in an exhibition space. Transaction can be essential to the way visitors relate to and experience within an exhibition.
- 3) **Ritual.** Visitors are familiar with rituals in many different aspects of their lives. Rituals contain two different kinds of drama: the aesthetic and the social. They are equally important for the meaning-making process, and museum exhibitions hold elements of both. Visitors play different roles according to their social position, whether they are tourists, scholars, experts or families etc. and they are active in creating meaning.
- 4) **Power.** Museums have a certain authority when putting up exhibitions; in most cases, it is entirely up to the museum to decide themes, storyline, settings, etc., and this influences the ways visitors are learning and make meaning. This is a specific power but also a great responsibility, especially because it often ‘forces’ museums to consider visitors’ own experiences and knowledge in ways that might not have been familiar to museums before (Fraser 2007: 291-302; Gadsby 2011; Hein 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Illeris 2006; Kaplan 1995).

This model acknowledges both the authority and the position of the museum and the role it has to play to its visitors and their values, knowledge, experiences and ideas: *“Visitors’ reaction or performances may be conscious or unconscious and can have positive or negative effects on how they subsequently view the museum and similar objects”* (Fraser 2007: 296-297). Fraser believes that this model might help level the power relations between visitors and curators and that it is in this relationship of knowledge, power, individual experiences, authority, identity and transaction that meaning-making occurs for everyone involved (Barrett 2011; Bedford 2001; Black 2005; Fraser 2007; Greenberg et al. 1996; Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Illeris 2006; McLean 1993; McLean and Pollock 2007; Scott 2008).

Museums have made some major changes in learning and experiences in exhibitions over the past few decades. The focus is, more than ever, on the visitor and Doering’s description of *clients* certainly does match this perception. It is therefore likely to view Doering’s definitions of strangers, guests and clients as a sort of chronological development in museums’ attitude towards a more visitor focused exhibition strategy. This is also reflected in the four different museum experiences and in Fraser’s model, which both express various views on how visitors use and interact with museum spaces.

It is possible to interpret the theory of the four different museum experiences as a chronological development too; a shift in thinking from object-orientated to visitor-focused exhibitions. Many museums have been keen on new developments towards a more visitor-focused practice and yet the biggest problem is concerned with museums’ own attitude towards learning and interaction approaches: *“People don’t KNOW they are replaying the same design approaches. People don’t build on what others have done - or take things in new directions - because they are operating in a relative vacuum. And most museums aren’t pushing for excellence - “adequate” seems to be good enough”* (McLean 2008: website). Kathleen McLean, principal of the museum consulting firm *Independent Exhibitions*, discusses the shift in thinking and others believe this shift to be necessary to improve the process of meaning-making: *“A move is necessary from the laboratory model of research, such as that used for early visitor studies, to a more sociological or ethnographic mode, which uses naturalistic settings*

and a more open-ended research agenda” (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 11). The development in visitor and exhibition thinking can clearly be spotted in many exhibitions from the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium - especially in the way curators have begun to think about exhibition spaces as part of new visitor interactive settings.

Falk and Dierking’s three components of physical, social and personal learning have an essential role in the shaping of individual visitor experiences too. Their definitions are aimed at fulfilling as many visitor needs as possible. The strategy is to focus on the creation of learning possibilities including everything from suitable learning environments and spaces for social interaction, to proper café or restaurant facilities. Even facilities without a direct connection to objects, learning activities or exhibitions will influence the overall learning experience. If museums consider every element as part of the museum experience, they can create better possibilities for learning and meaning-making (Falk and Dierking 1992; 2000).

In connection with Falk and Dierking’s theory it can be useful to have a look at the four types of ‘social objects’ as they are defined by Simon: “*Social objects are the engines of socially networked experiences, the content around which conversation happens. Social objects allow people to focus their attention on a third thing rather than on each other, making interpersonal engagement more comfortable*” (Simon 2010: 127-128):

- 1) **Personal:** People have a personal connection to the object and it can generate an immediate story to tell.
- 2) **Active:** Some objects can directly insert themselves into the spaces between visitors - for example animals in a zoo.
- 3) **Provocative:** Some objects are special or provoke a reaction just by being present or by their looks.
- 4) **Relational:** Some objects invite interpersonal use simply because they require several people to use them before they work - for example telephones (Simon 2010: 130-132).

Simon also explores five design techniques that can activate social objects in a physical design:

- 1) *“Asking visitors questions and prompting them to share their reactions to the objects on display.*
- 2) *Providing live interpretation or performance to help visitors make a personal connection to artefacts.*
- 3) *Designing exhibitions with provocative presentation techniques that display objects in juxtaposition, conflict or conversation with each other.*
- 4) *Giving visitors clear instructions on how to engage with each other around the object.*
- 5) *Offering visitors ways to share objects either physically or virtually”* (Simon 2010: 138).

Simon encourages museums to explore which of these five techniques works best at their museum.

There are many different ways of identifying visitor interaction and experiences and it is likely to be one of those subjects most professionals will never agree upon; some elements will work well at some museums and not at others. This is one of the main reasons why museums have to consider every possible factor in their communication practices, from the building and spaces to its audiences, interpretations and interactions. Although museums increasingly put their collections and communication online, the space in which experience and interaction take place is still mainly the exhibition.

Exhibition Theories and Exhibition Spaces

Many of the learning and communication theories described so far have a postmodern approach to creating learning environments; during the last few decades visitors have become the centre of attention in communication processes. In exhibitions, this has meant a shift in thinking from modern and instructive learning styles to a more socially engaging and open-ended postmodern approach. Not only does the learner play a more active part in the postmodern learning process, creation of new knowledge and processes of meaning-making are also considered to be in constant change. Visitors construct their own meanings, and museums are viewed as enablers in this process. Today, museums act as empowering institutions where interaction between society and culture can take place and evolve (Hein 1998: 155-179; Hooper-Greenhill 2004: 556-

575; Karp and Lavine 1991; Lavine 1991; Serrell 1998).

Museums have to create motivation. In other words, they have to find ways to motivate and inspire visitors to participate in the creation of new knowledge and meaning. This seems to be one of the most difficult tasks in the complicated shift from modern to postmodern thinking. Firstly, because museum educators and curators have not been used to communicating in this 'interactive' way before, and many visitors have not 'learned' to use museums in this way either (at least not the older generations of museum visitors). However, the more museums are discussing use and implementation of learning and communication styles, the more they gradually influence both their own way of communicating and the way visitors approach learning. This becomes evident as new generations of educated museologists, exhibition designers and heritage communicators take to museums (Baxandall 1991; Bradley 1994; Drummond and Yeoman 2000; Fleming 2005: 53-61; Hein 1998: 155-179; Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 28-42; 2004: 556-575; Knell 2003; 2004; Silverstone 1992).

Museums have found many ways of engaging and interacting with visitors through exhibitions, and although not all learning and communication styles will (or should) work everywhere, many museums so far have been very creative when it comes to motivating and stimulating learning. Although there will be different variations of the following exhibition approaches, they create an image of some of the most important postmodern changes within exhibition communication. Equally, they might provide a clearer view on how museums have reacted to postmodern thinking within one of their most essential communication spaces.

Exhibition and Display Approaches

Underpinning the concept of museum exhibitions is the study of collections and material culture. Objects and collections have always shaped exhibitions and the stories they tell. Interaction with 'the real thing' still seems to be what most people associate with exhibitions. However, when objects are grouped together in exhibitions their stories change; they are put in contexts they have never been part of before in order to create a connection and to narrow the gap between past and present. Objects and collections themselves do not change but through displays, museums can change meanings and create a totally new concept of making meaning for visitors (Black 2005:

271-274). Many theoretical display approaches are developing but a few of the most essential will be discussed here. Black has identified six different approaches to object display; variations might be spotted in different types of exhibitions; but they all emphasise how complex the range of meanings can be within exhibition settings:

1) Open Storage. This is meant to be a mass display: *"designed to give the general public visual access to collections that would otherwise be in the museum store"* (Black 2005: 275). Many museums have tried this approach with varied success. It can provide visitors with a different view on collections, but it can also be extremely difficult to engage visitors any further through an open storage; mainly because different sets of restrictions and supervision can make visitors feel more isolated from objects than in an actual exhibition. However, it is possible to study objects that have not been on display before and not put in a particular context (Thistle 1994).

2) Object Display. In an object display approach visitors are presented with a collection as it (more or less) is. Objects are supposed to speak for themselves and no further interpretation or themes are added. This approach is often seen in art galleries where artworks are expected to communicate directly with visitors. The exhibition space is made as 'neutral' and discreet as possible.

3) Object-oriented. In the object-oriented approach, the focus is on the objects. There is still very little information or interpretations in the exhibition (perhaps just a short label). Objects might be organised in a specific classifications; chronologically, aesthetically, etc. We often see this approach in national museums - especially in archaeological exhibitions. It might be viewed as a modern exhibition approach, particularly because it leaves little room for further interpretation. However, for an analytical learner this approach can be very engaging.

4) Learning-focused. In learning-focused exhibitions objects are supported by many interpretations and analyses, and information can seem rather dense. The focus is on how visitors learn and create meaning, rather than on the objects.

5) Thematic. A thematic exhibition focuses on a theme. Objects are chosen to support the theme, but might not have anything else in common.

6) Concept. In the concept-based approach objects are supporting a message or information set up by the museum. Attention is on the concepts, and objects are more or less 'reduced' to support whatever ideas or perspectives the museum has chosen (Black 2005: 274-276).

Swedish museologist, Per-Uno Ågren, defined six similar exhibition approaches in 1995, although with minor variations from Black's:

- 1) The systematic exhibition:** Often chronological exhibitions.
- 2) The isolated exhibition:** Very similar to Black's definition of an Object Display approach.
- 3) The contextual exhibition:** In these exhibitions we often find reconstructed environments, and objects are shown in these settings.
- 4) The analytical exhibition:** These exhibitions show how objects were used and made, and focus can be on material or technology.
- 5) The story exhibition:** Often a thematic exhibition with a clear focus on a story or a specific theme.

6) The meta-realistic exhibition: Ågren almost created this definition in opposition to the systematic exhibition. Objects are put on display in totally new settings, and in connections that might be very creative. These exhibitions are meant to be thought provoking and often create a lot of discussion and debate (Ågren 1995: 40-42).

A popular example of such an exhibition is American theatre director and artist Robert Wilson's exhibition, *Anna didn't come home that night*, which was designed and

put up at The Danish Museum of Decorative Arts (now: Design Museum Denmark) in 2000. In the exhibition, Wilson designed sixteen tableaux with dramatic visual and physical effects that were meant to entangle all senses. The tableaux visualized the last day, 21 November 1917, in the life of Anna who went to a dinner party and never returned home. Visitors never get to meet Anna and do not know what has happened to her, but by looking for clues in each room, visitors get an idea of Anna's life and how it has been interwoven with female characters from fairy tales like *Alice in Wonderland* or *Cinderella*. The exhibition created the possibility for visitors to make up their own stories of what has happened to Anna by putting objects in totally new and unexpected settings and by creating theatre-like settings within the exhibition space (*Anna didn't come home that night*: website).

Ågren also identified three different visitor types that resemble McCarthy's and Leflar's four types of learners:

1) The knowledge-seeking, who has often prepared and read a lot before visiting an exhibition. He/she will come to see a particular exhibition because of a strong interest. Here we may see McCarthy's and Leflar's Imaginative or Analytical learner as well, who often takes a critical and well-prepared approach to new knowledge.

2) The understanding-seeking, who might not have prepared much before visiting, but seeks a certain understanding or connection between the different themes and questions raised in an exhibition. A Commonsense learner or imaginative learner will often take the same approach.

3) The entertainment-seeking, who wants to be entertained through interaction, guided tours, reconstructions, hands-on elements, film-clips, etc. (Ågren 1995: 42). Here we might also find a dynamic learner or perhaps the commonsense learner; meaning is created through experiments and it can be a bit challenging to keep the attention of this type of visitor (Bradburne 1998: 39-52; Hein 1998: 14-40; Hodder 1994; McCarthy and Leflar 1983; Pearce 1992; 1995; Wood

2005; Ågren 1995: 42).

Museums have different ways of analysing their exhibitions and their visitors; many museums still find information on their visitors through surveys and seek to match their exhibition communication to these. Although surveys may provide very useful information on visitors, it is mainly through the actual exhibition space that we can spot developments in postmodern, interactive and technological tendencies.

Exhibition Writings

Writing texts for exhibitions have always been a challenge. Most visitors are familiar with exhibitions that are filled with text and labels. Generally, most museums put too much text in their exhibitions, often because they have too much to tell, which is a common mistake that still seems to ‘haunt’ many museum exhibitions: “*An exhibition text has to put up with more competition than most other written material. It has to compete for people’s attention with all the other material and tends to be the last thing to catch their eye when they stand in front of the exhibits*” (Ekarv 1994: 201). Writer Margareta Ekarv developed the *Ekarv method* while writing exhibition texts for the Swedish Postal Museum. She believed that it was possible to write museum texts that are so attractive they will enable readers to enjoy and learn from them. Evaluations of her method carried out by Jennifer Sabine at Swansea Museum and Elizabeth Gilmore at Nature in Art have confirmed that most of her theories have provided positive feedback from visitors (Gilmore and Sabine 1994). Ekarv’s research especially focused on the use of simple language, short and simple lines, texts should be in print large enough for everyone to read, always use the attractive form of verbs, avoid complicated constructions and unnecessary adverbs, texts should be read aloud as many visitors do this in exhibitions (especially adults in the company of children) and finally a text should be so easy and interesting to read that visitors want to read to the end (Carter 1994; Ekarv 1994; Gilmore and Sabine 1994: 206-208; Kavanagh 1991; 1996; 2000; Silverman 1995). A very important aspect of this method is that writing attractive and readable texts also seem to combat museum fatigue in visitors (Gilman 1916).

In November 2010 Director of Rand and Associates, Judy Rand, spoke about her experience with exhibition texts and creation at a workshop for museum professionals

held by the USS Constitution Museum in Boston (Family Learning Forum: website). She identified three major mistakes that label writers generally make in exhibitions: labels are too foggy, flabby and too long (Rand 2010: website). She found that most labels consist of passive writing, technical terms and use of jargon and most labels are simply too long or have very long sentences (Family Learning Forum: website).

Rand also believes that the typical mistakes made by exhibition designers are, making the type too small, lacking contrasts, and placing labels in places that make them difficult for visitors to read (Family Learning Forum 2010: website; Rand 2010: website). It is important for visitors to know whose ‘voice’ they are hearing during a museum visit. It is also essential that visitors engage with labels and texts; encouraging conversation or directly asking questions are often effective ways of doing this. Rand believes that it is important for curators or designers to constantly put themselves in the visitor’s position and ask how visitors actually behave in an exhibition.

Through these observations and experiences, Rand found that more people would read three separate fifty-word labels than one label of one-hundred-and-fifty words (Family Learning Forum 2010: website). However, making labels of only fifty words is a challenge for most museum curators; texts have to be focused and to the point, they have to be engaging and interesting from the first word, they have to be relevant to visitors and more than anything they have to be readable (Rand 2010: website)

Rand’s approach to exhibition texts can be viewed as postmodern as it focuses on visitors’ interests and questions in the creation of texts. This approach may also encourage curators and designers to create a stronger focus on exhibition themes: *“Successful exhibition graphics help the visitor to navigate both space and story; they define the context and the atmosphere of the story; they create an experience and through this they can enhance the visitor’s intellectual engagement as well as appeal to their senses and imagination”* (Piehl and Macleod 2012: 257).

When creating a new exhibition, the different exhibition theories, visitor requirements and physical or online objects have to be defined from the outset of the exhibition design. Exhibition design may pose some overall challenges. Firstly, not all

museums are collections, so not all museums are about displaying a collection. Secondly, some museums do not have a building or a 'home' therefore design is not always about location. The design and construction processes are essential in connection with the definition of exhibition themes, texts, and the creation of visitor interaction and experiences.

The case studies used in this thesis demonstrate very differing approaches to exhibition texts and labels. While some exhibition settings clearly display accessibility, participation and interaction approaches, labels in the same exhibitions can often demonstrate where museums are still stuck in a modern approach. The eagerness to tell as much as possible often results in very long texts and labels packed with words and long complicated sentences. A postmodern writing approach within exhibitions will be more interactive than a modern one, and constantly seek to aim texts in different forms at different sections of audiences. Today exhibition texts also involve the use of social media and technology within displays. Reading texts therefore happens at different levels when visiting an exhibition. Exhibition texts can be supportive and underline the stories of objects on display; however, they can also offer competition for visitors' attention. The final part of this section will outline how texts can be used to display a modern or postmodern exhibition approach, and how exhibition texts can form visitors' attention before, during and after a visit.

Despite the research conducted in the practice of writing and displaying exhibition labels (Bitgood 2000; Ekarv 1994; Gilmore and Sabine 1994), many museums still seem to put too much text in their exhibitions. Often they even display it in modern styles, instead of attempting a postmodern approach, which is applied in other exhibition features. An example of modern approaches to labels is shown at The British Golf Museum (*Image 6*), where long texts accompany objects on display in a very chronological exhibition setting. This exhibition generally has a modern setting, although with occasionally postmodern features. In a chronological exhibition this can work well - however, it requires that the museum consider which elements are essential to visitors and which elements may be considered additional, as it is unlikely that visitors will go through all the texts. As described, the psychology of visitor behaviour indicated that visitor will spend very little time engaging with labels and generally want

to spend more time interacting with stories, objects and other visitors (Bitgood 2010; 2013). In the Natural World Galleries at the National Museum of Scotland, the exhibition texts are mainly digital as they can be found on touch screens. This does not necessarily make them shorter or more concise, on the contrary. However, the process of accessing them requires of visitors that they become involved with the settings. The process behind accessing the labels can therefore be considered postmodern, as it requires interaction. However, some visitors may find it more troublesome to seek information in this way and may have to spend some time searching for the information they need.

The first piece of text visitors come across at a museum is often floor plans or maps. Floor plans have to be easy to navigate which often provides a big challenge for larger museums with many galleries. This also seems to be the case for National Museum of Scotland, as the floor plan has to display the layout of the exhibition themes spread over several floors. A floor plan also has to be clear about how visitors get from one floor to another - or in some cases, from one building to another. This can be complicated and also requires that information signs and accessibility are thorough and easy to find throughout the museum.

Natural World

From outer space to endangered species, our geology and zoology collections demonstrate the diversity and evolution of planet Earth and the animal kingdom in dynamic displays.

Galleries

Earth in Space Level 1
Animal World Level 1
Restless Earth Level 3
Animal Senses Level 3
Adventure Planet Level 5
Survival Level 5

★ Astrolabe
★ Amethyst geodes
★ Ching Ching

World Cultures

Remarkable objects, many collected by Scottish explorers and entrepreneurs, reveal how indigenous peoples around the globe live their lives and express themselves through art, music and performance.

Galleries

Living Lands Level 1
Patterns of Life Level 1
Imagine Level 1
Performance and Lives Level 3
Facing the Sea Level 3
Inspired by Nature Level 5
Artistic Legacies Level 5
Looking East Level 5

★ Waka
★ Benin king

Art & Design

From ancient times to the industrial age, discover how artists, designers and inventors have been inspired by history, religion, mythology, materials and methods to create an astonishing array of unusual and everyday objects.

Galleries

Art and Industry Level 1
Ancient Egypt Level 3
European Styles Level 5

★ Coffin of an Egyptian queen
★ Meissen lion

Science & Technology

Communications, transport, scientific instruments, industry and engineering: our collections reveal how we have investigated the world around us and sought to make our lives easier and better through the ages.

Galleries

Connect Level 1
Communicate Level 3
Shaping Our World Level 5

★ Dolly the sheep

Scotland

A journey through these galleries uncovers Scotland from its geological beginnings right up to the present day. Archaeological finds, social history and applied arts: real things found, made and used in Scotland.

Galleries

Beginnings Level-1
Early People Level-1
Kingdom of the Scots Level 0, 1 & 2
Scotland Transformed Level 3
Industry and Empire Level 4 & 5
Scotland: A Changing Nation Level 6
Working engines
Newcomen engine and Douglas and Grant engine
10:40–16:10 daily Level 3

★ Hunterston brooch
★ Lewis chesspieces
★ Bonnie Prince Charlie's canteen
★ Victoria Cross

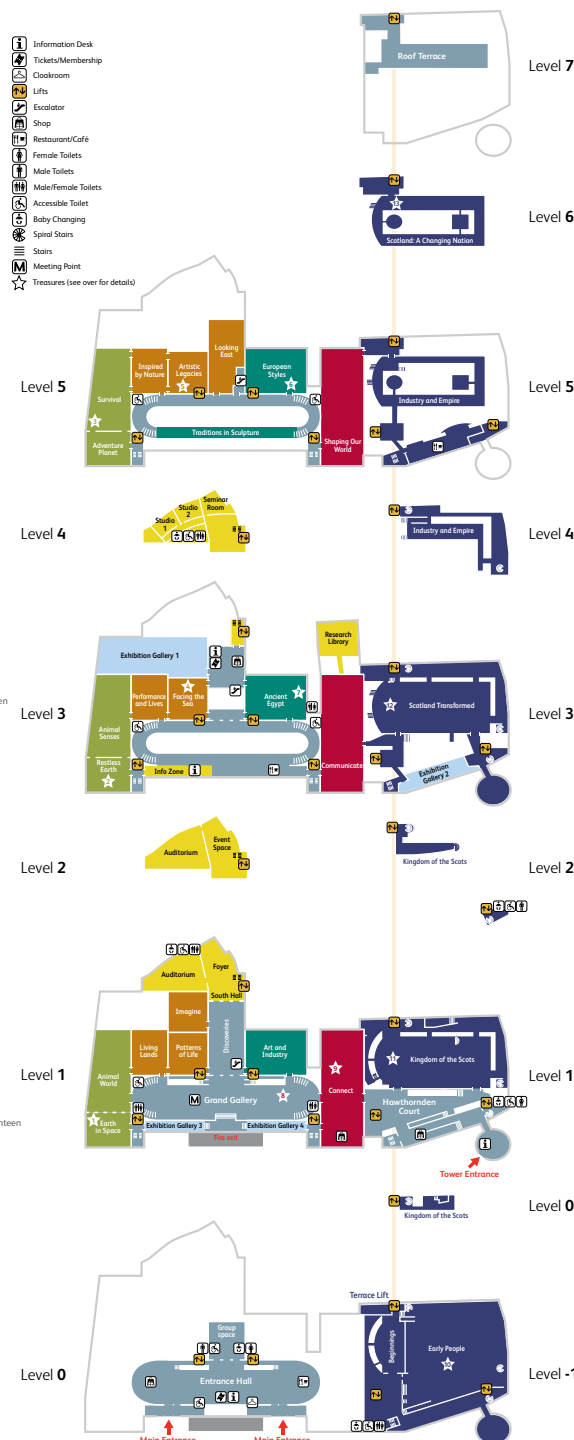
Learning & Information

The three-storey Learning Centre is the hub of inspiring educational activities for all ages, seven days a week. Back in the Grand Gallery, drop into the Info Zone and discover more of the stories behind our collections, or visit the Research Library for in-depth study.

Learning Centre Foyer Level 1

Auditorium Level 1 & 2
Info Zone Level 3
Research Library Level 3
Seminar Room and Studios 1 & 2 Level 4

- Information Desk
- Tickets/Membership
- Cloakroom
- Lifts
- Escalator
- Shop
- Restaurant/Café
- Female Toilets
- Male Toilets
- Male/Female Toilets
- Accessible Toilet
- Baby Changing
- Spinal Stairs
- Stairs
- Meeting Point
- Treasures (see over for details)



Roof Terrace



The best views in Edinburgh, Level 7

Take the lift all the way to the top floor for an unforgettable view of the Edinburgh skyline and surrounding countryside; explore examples of Scottish flora and sculptures by Andy Goldsworthy.

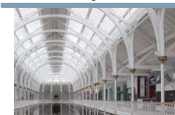
Discoveries



The Millennium Clock towers over the entrance to Discoveries, Level 1

Innovators and inventors, diplomats and military leaders, adventurers and the celebrities of their time – intriguing objects reveal the legacy of Scots whose ideas and leadership had impact across the world. See the magnificent Millennium Clock and hear its unusual chime, every hour on the hour.

Grand Gallery



Age-innerving architecture

This magnificent public space at the heart of the Victorian building, with its elegant cast-iron construction and natural overhead lighting, once again displays dramatic objects as was originally intended.

★ IndKeith lighthouse optic

Hawthornden Court



F1 car belonging to Sir Jackie Stewart OBE, Hawthornden Court Level 1

Set out from here on your journey of discovery through the Scottish collections, displayed over five floors and framed by dramatic, contemporary architecture. You can also take the lift to The Tower Restaurant from here.

Entrance Hall



Access all areas: the new Entrance Hall, Level 0

The original Victorian basement is now an atmospheric street-level entrance, with fascinating objects on open display and first class visitor facilities, including information desk, shop and Museum Bar/terrace.

Image 8: Floor plan from National Museum of Scotland. The layout can seem confusing to some visitors as the individual exhibition themes are spread over several floors (National Museum of Scotland, Floor Plan: website).

Where modern labels can seem very text-heavy, postmodernism sought to minimise label texts and instead allow for a certain degree of visitor interaction often through living history features (where volunteers or staff, often in historic outfits, tell the story of a place or exhibition etc. directly to visitors). As mentioned, postmodern museums focus particularly on communication of stories and themes, as opposed to presenting a chronological history. This often provides opportunities for better visitor interaction, focus on global contexts, and the possibility of learning through different voices. Through interaction, it is possible for visitors to add their own subjective experiences and voices to a museum experience. As this particular aspect of museum communication develops, we will see tendencies towards even more transformation within museological communication. These transformations to museum communication will later be explored in detail as they slowly begin to form a new phase and create new developments to postmodern features of museological articulations.

The following two case studies, from Barley Hall and Riverside Museum, have a very different approach to labels and texts. At Barley Hall, texts and labels are reduced to a minimum. The setting and visitor interactive approach are meant to provide visitors with information and create social experiences. This approach can provide many participatory experiences for some visitors while others may feel they need more direct information to base their experiences on. A transformative approach (which will be described in detail in Chapter 6) to labels and texts can be found at The Riverside Museum where texts are transformed through touch screens to include videos, essays, audio features etc. The museum even produced their actual text labels by hiring a professional writer working on the basis of information provided by curators (Riverside Museum: website). This layered approach allows for many different types of visitors to interact with the information provided by many different voices. Visitors themselves can even participate directly in the stories by adding their own experiences. This constantly transforms information and how it is experienced, not just in the exhibition settings but also in the mind of visitors. It is also worth noting that the simple act of reading becomes different through digital media. Design and display can be altered and the use of three-dimensional perspectives can ensure greater attention from visitors: *“Rarely do visitors start their viewing experience by reading text. In study after study, graphic panels not associated with some three-dimensional objects receive very*

little attention” (Bitgood 2000: 31). Exhibition texts seem to work best when complementing objects on display and interactive experiences. This makes the focus on attention and participation very important in any exhibition setting. Museums therefore have to consider where visitors focus their attention, and how to make use of this attention (Bitgood 2000; 2013; Brochu 2013; Veverka 2011b).

New Tendencies within Museums

Although these various exhibition and visitor theories have a major influence on the creation of exhibitions there are new tendencies that have to be mentioned in connection with exhibition creation and interaction as well. Sometimes new methods or perspectives either force or encourage new approaches in the museum space and sometimes new approaches can affect how exhibitions are to develop in the future. The following paragraphs will look at two different aspects that have influenced many museums’ communication and learning programmes over the last couple of decades, including the use of new digital media and technology within the exhibition space and the tendency towards project work and how it might influence museum communication and learning.

Exhibitions and new Technology

During the last decade, museum professionals have often discussed the use of new technology and virtual media in exhibitions. Although many experiments and research projects have already been carried out, it is an area that will continue to inspire debate. Technology has managed to take the museum ‘outside’ the actual museum buildings; whether it is online or in new settings around cities or in the countryside. This has been a demand from the audience; mobile and online technology is part of everyone’s life and will therefore have a natural place in visitor communication.

Technology, and online media in particular, has been used in museums in many different ways so far:

- To support public access to collections
- To increase marketing
- As an interface for the presentation of information

- To enable visitors to select data or information for themselves
- To contextualise a museum object, e.g. by showing how the whole object looked or showing how it was used or in which context
- To extend the learning experience beyond the museum building through the use of websites, online databases, etc.
- To allow visitors to contribute to the research, interaction and communication of a museum exhibition to some degree
- To enable visitors to offer their own views or interpretations
- To offer visitors an opportunity to leave their own mark on an exhibition or research question
- To provide access to collections for people with different needs and thereby extend the learning experience
- To extend the learning experience by supporting interaction between visitors (King 2003: website).

Although there are likely more ways of using technology in museums, it is important to remember when to stop using it too. Some museums seem to be using technology just because they feel they have to. Just as many museums used to be criticised for creating text-heavy exhibitions, they also risk creating exhibitions limited to virtual screens or panels. There is no doubt that technology has created new ways of communicating for museums, but since most museums feel that they are here to represent objects of the past, it can be difficult for museums to find a proper balance between the two concepts.

What we have to remember is that there comes a time when digital media in museum exhibitions is no longer ‘new’ technology; museums will no longer have to make a choice between ‘digital’ or ‘non-digital’ but rather it will become natural to blend the two. This means that museums will begin to use different assumptions and different sets of terms for the use of technology both within and outside the museum. Technology will then no longer be ‘thought’ into the exhibition space as something extra that needs to be provided but will become a natural part of communication just as it is already a natural part of our daily communication (Cameron 2003; Fahy 1995; Furse-Roberts 2011; Hodge 2011; King 2003: website; Ride 2012; Tran and King 2007;

Van Mensch 2005; Wallace 1995). Understanding how technology influences communication and narratives is an area that will need constant research (Ride 2012: 276).

It can be argued that technology has given museums the confidence to communicate outside the museum buildings at more levels than first assumed; although it is obvious to use different social media as marketing tools and to interact with visitors, some museums have even taken the step to literally move their collections outside the buildings as will be explored in Chapter 4 (The Grand Tour in York: website).

Project Creation

It seems a new approach to technology has given some museums the courage to be more experimental, not just in their exhibition designs but also to seek out new partnerships and form new cooperation with other heritage institutions, IT and software developers, exhibition consultants and marketing companies. This is something we gradually see in the many temporary projects museums have taken on during the last couple of decades. Often it is a means of securing the proper funding for a particular project, but many museums seem willing to work on and develop new projects next to their daily work.

For most museums it is certainly not a problem to develop creative, new and exciting ideas that can supplement or expand their current research, exhibitions, learning or communication. Most museums are also keen to work with exhibition consultants or to form other partnerships around a specific project. Museums have also found that developing projects is a way of finding new funding possibilities, especially during a financial crisis. Many different private and public sources offer financial support to new building work, designs, learning centres, online cataloguing or web exhibitions and so on. However, these kinds of financial supports are mainly aimed at very specific ideas or new developments. Museums therefore have to develop thematic or subject-oriented projects to secure this type of funding. This is why project work has become an increasing and important new work method. The downside to this work method is that if museums cannot take on new projects in addition to their daily work, often they cannot manage them properly because they cannot afford to hire temporary staff members to run the projects, which means the current staff members have to take

on new demanding tasks. In some cases, project work is not updated or re-developed after it has finished essentially because museums cannot manage it next to their daily work (Newton 2005).

Projects can be developed and created through many aspects of museum work and often involve totally new ways of setting up communication elements. Projects also have the advantage of aiming at a very distinct target audience. Projects also require museum staff to think about their work in new ways; often project work requires very strict deadlines and has to be finished and launched at a specific date. It is therefore not surprising that most staff members cannot find the time to work on a project and manage their daily work at the same time. Employing temporary staff is often part of a project budget, however, this also means that project staff tend to leave the museum again after the project is finished. This often results in the project not being updated or re-developed as permanent staff members are left to work on a project they may not have been much involved in. Dealing with a project can be a challenge for a smaller museum because the project itself can take up a lot of space and time for all members of staff even if they are not all directly involved; projects require a lot of attention from management and directors and that will often influence the daily work as well.

Although there are many challenges to overcome, there can also be many new advantages and possibilities involved when embarking on projects. I had a personal experience in 2009-2011 when I was working as project manager at the Bangsbo Fort Museum, part of Coast Museum North Jutland, in Denmark. Bangsbo Fort was built by the Germans during the Second World War and the site consists of seventy concrete bunkers that were built on (and inside of) a hillside eighty meters above sea level. In 1950, the Danish Navy built another ten bunkers and during the Cold War the fort continued to be in use. All of the bunkers still exist today and the Coast Museum North Jutland has created Bangsbo Fort Museum as an important part of the area's heritage. The museum has opened and restored as many bunkers as possible so that the story of the fort can be told to visitors. Although the fort as a museum had always been a popular place to visit by locals, the museum sought to expand their audience groups by introducing a new project that was particularly aimed at school children and youngsters aged fourteen to seventeen. For many museums this particular age group is very

difficult to attract and the museum therefore embarked on a close partnership with educators and school teachers to explore how the interest of this group could be captured. The work resulted in the *Bangsbo Experience* project, which was launched in 2011 (Bangsbo Experience: website).

The Bangsbo Experience was developed with roots in modern computer gaming where historic themes and plots of the fort act as the main story. During their visit the youngsters were ‘taken back in time’ to 1944 when the fort was occupied by the German army and they were meant to take on a specific personality (and tasks) at the fort as a soldier in the German Army. They would be briefed about their positions, posted in the bunkers and given specific tasks to do. As soldiers they had to carry out orders and fulfil certain tasks according to their position at the fort - they would also depend on each other’s tasks and choices along the way. During the game they would be presented with moral dilemmas of warfare and asked to make their choices accordingly. Physically the game took place via mobile technology, iPads and interactive surface tables. This is technology that is already used and well known to this age group. The original bunkers provided an authentic setting and it was possible to continue the experience in the classroom after the visit by logging in to the project’s website and exploring what choices the children had made during the process. The aim of the project was to engage this particular age group directly in the history of the fort and, at the same time, supplement the student’s curriculum with themes of the Second World War, warfare and the moral and personal dilemmas that follow.

Apart from offering the great challenge of placing modern technology in bunkers from the 1940s (most bunkers consists of walls made of up to sixty centimetres of solid concrete - therefore mobile and online connection was very hard to provide!), the project also embarked on forming partnerships with many varied organisations including IT- and software developers, teachers and educators, historians and script writers and the youngsters themselves. Because of the direct project outline, the project provided a very precise cooperation platform for everyone involved. Museums rarely get a chance to explore such partnerships in their daily work, and it is even rarer to involve so many different participants in the process. One of the biggest challenges was to experience just how time consuming the project turned out to be for everyone involved. Restoring the bunkers to proper use, securing the proper hardware and

planning and management of ideas and input from teachers, educators, historians and scriptwriters took a long time.

It is a very interesting experience for any museum to undertake these kinds of projects; through new partnerships the museum gets an opportunity to explore its own resources, collections, communication and learning even further and form new connections with partners and community groups that may generate new ideas. However, it also requires that the museum is very well prepared as project work will inevitably influence the management, planning and running of the daily museum work too. Equally, it requires the museum to update and keep developing the project after the project creation period has finished.

Section 2: Case Studies

Identifying Exhibition Approaches

As in chapter 1, this section will analyse two very different exhibitions in order to identify theoretical approaches in museum exhibitions. The analyses are again subjective and based on my own observations. Also, it should be noted that naturally very few (if any) museums have considered all of these theories when planning their exhibitions. Although it is possible to spot indications of all learning and exhibition theories in almost every exhibition, closer analysis of these theories within exhibition spaces can give an indication of how theories have been viewed in connection with actual exhibition practice. New approaches on exhibition communication and visitor inclusion can also be brought to light by looking at a few examples.

Case study: Barley Hall

Barley Hall is a reconstructed medieval townhouse in the city of York. It was originally built around 1360 by the monks of Nostell Priory who used it as a hospice or a townhouse. In the 1460s a prominent local goldsmith, William Snawsell, rented the building which was extended during the fifteenth century. The later history of the building is less clear although it had been divided into smaller units during the seventeenth century. By the early 1980s the building was in a very unsafe condition and was up for demolition. In 1987, during the demolition process the medieval architecture was rediscovered and the house was bought by York Archaeological Trust who restored it and made it into a museum (York Archaeological Trust: website). Restoring the building proved to be controversial; just thirty percent of the original wooden timber remained and the building had been altered considerably since the original medieval period. It was decided that the building should be reconstructed as it had appeared in the 1480s and named Barley Hall after the Trust's chairman, Professor Maurice Barley. The trust also decided to use replica furniture and fittings based on an inventory made in the fifteenth century. This was viewed as an innovative attempt to present the building's history and the accuracy of the work was praised, despite critics raising concern over the nature of the preservation work as it relied heavily on replicas (Barley Hall:

website).

The ground floor of the building is made up of several different rooms. Amongst others, store rooms (which contain a large amount of original woodwork from the 1360s), a pantry, buttery and the Great Hall. On the first floor is a parlour overlooking the hall, a gallery and several bedchambers. Barley Hall has annual changing exhibitions containing original objects as well as permanent displays holding copies of medieval artefacts, costumes and games from the period, which visitors are invited to try on and play with.



Image 9: Main table in the Great Hall of Barley Hall (Photo: Jane Nielsen, July 2008).

Interaction is at the heart of the museum in every way; the entire building seems to have been made into one huge hands-on activity. Visitors are allowed to handle objects, try on clothes, sit on the chairs and are in every way encouraged to create their own story within the town house and its history. For children especially, this seems to create a very engaging learning environment. When observing children, most of them seemed at home immediately and quickly began testing and trying the different objects

in the rooms or even invented their own little ‘roleplays’ pretending they lived in the house in medieval times and held imaginary feasts in the Great Hall were they could be a noble lord or lady who entertained guests in the parlour etc. The scenery changes in almost every room thus creating new spaces for new stories. This direct interaction seems to work very well and adults (particularly in the company of children) can easily take part in it as well.

It can, however, be difficult to find a quiet space to engage more deeply in the medieval history of the building; it is not difficult to find further information on the building or its residents, however, transferring the information to the actual building seemed difficult because the interaction and hands-on elements take up a great part of the experience. The museum seems to make up for this in their changing exhibitions; often these exhibitions reflect on medieval costumes or particular artefacts and it is possible to go into great detail about these objects and their history. These exhibitions were the only parts of the museum where visitors acted as ‘visitors’ in the traditional sense of a museum experience; objects are to be observed but not touched. This actually created a welcomed break from the hands-on elements for many visitors who wanted to further study particular objects or history of medieval town houses.



Image 10: Barley Hall seen from the courtyard (Photo: Jane Nielsen, July 2008).

It seems clear that the museum has indeed been created for people who want to interact directly with the building and objects. Children and adults in the company of children find the museum especially engaging. Visitors engage with each other and the exhibitions very much create a 'we' orientated focus (Simon 2010: 26-27). Objects are active and relational and visitors interact through the use of objects (e.g. trying on clothes and so on) by putting objects in direct relation to their own lives or the 'game' or 'roleplay' they might create during the visit (Eternity 2010: website).

Visitors are regarded as *Clients* here and have their own say in the exhibition. They are very much allowed room to draw upon their own experiences, memories and thoughts (Doering 1999: 130-135). The exhibitions consist of all four museum experiences as defined by Doering: social experience - as visitors are encouraged to interact and it also seems clear that visitors will gain more from the visit through social interaction. Object experience - as visitors are allowed to touch, try on, etc. the objects on display. Cognitive experience - as visitors participate actively in the exhibition whilst reflecting on the meanings created in the more 'traditional' exhibition spaces at Barley Hall. Introspective experiences - as visitors are allowed to imagine different times or places and are encouraged to use their individual experiences and memories. It is very rare that an exhibition touches on all these experiences and thereby allows visitors to draw their experiences from whichever they prefer.

Considering Fraser's different components, it becomes clear that the museum has sought to create an identity for visitors by relating their displays directly to the building's history and to visitors' own emotions and interaction. This is essential to the meaning-making process particularly because some visitors immediately feel at home in these kinds of exhibitions. The social and personal interaction with objects and themes might therefore start right away. Barley Hall has a specific historical context and theme to relate exhibitions to. However, by making almost every aspect of the building and its exhibitions a hands-on experience, the museum also takes a certain risk in that it relies on visitors to be able to engage actively in what is offered and to directly make their own meaning and experiences from this. When presented in a suitable context, as seems to be the case in Barley Hall, this becomes a great power for the museum (Fraser 2007), especially because the social visitor experience is entirely in focus during the visit.

Defining a direct exhibition approach naturally depends on which experience the museums are trying to create. At Barley Hall we see elements of Black's thematic exhibition approach created around the historic period of 1480s and town houses of this period (Black 2005: 274-276). There are also aspects of concept-based exhibitions; hands-on objects chosen in the exhibitions are set up to support concepts of interaction and social learning. This is closely connected to Ågren's story exhibition yet we also see analytical exhibition approaches in the way objects are used as part of creating the right story for visitors (Ågren 1995). It can be argued that Ågren's meta-realistic exhibition approach is shown at Barley Hall: objects are perhaps not put in new settings but the approach of letting visitors physically touch and interact with all objects is surprising for many visitors and can be thought-provoking. The exhibitions certainly apply to Ågren's entertainment-seeking visitors or McCarthy's and Leflar's dynamic learner. There are a few labels in the rooms that briefly describe a bit about the house and the use of the room visitors are entering. However, labels are rare and most visitors do not spend much time reading them. This can be a problem as visitors without much prior knowledge and little or no wish to engage in hands-on activities can find it difficult to understand what they are actually suppose to learn or experience.

Barley Hall does provide a new approach to the well-known hands-on exhibitions; although the old town house might seem like one big 'playground' the exhibitions have clearly been well considered in connection to the different historical phases of the house's existence. Also, it is worth noticing that both visitors and objects are in social learning positions in every room (apart from a few changing exhibitions). There are not any technological elements in the exhibitions and they do not seem to be missed by anyone during the social interaction. Either visitors are too engaged in trying or testing objects or the different rooms provide enough experiences in themselves.

One thing that can be missed, especially by analytical learners, is further historical information on the house and its use. Visitors either have to seek information at the museum in forms of brochures or purchase books or browse the internet. It also seems to add to the learning experience to be in the company of children as children are especially engaged with the hands-on elements; observing their game and thoughts on medieval objects without providing them with much prior knowledge is a very interesting part of the learning and meaning-making process.

Case Study: Riverside Museum

The Riverside Museum in Glasgow was completed in June 2011 and was created as a new development for the Glasgow Museum of Transport. The building was designed by Zaha Hadid Architects and engineers Buro Happold and the new exhibitions and displays by Event Communications. The Museum of Transport had up until then been situated at Kelvin Hall, however, the new museum building at Pointhouse Quay in the Glasgow Harbour created a more environmentally suitable place for the transport collections and allowed for far more objects to be on display. From the outside the museum has big glass walls at each end; one is the entrance and the other frames a view of *The Tall Ship* (*The Glenlee* - a three masted barque) moored outside. The construction of the new museum began in 2007 and cost a total of £74 million. Apart from *The Tall Ship*, the building's position on the harbour also allows an outdoor learning space to be part of the milieu that surrounds the museum.

Inside, visitors get an impression of the museum's aim through the architecture; "*The space is obviously about movement, suggesting the dynamism of which all the once-mobile exhibits are now deprived*" (Moore 2011: website). Riverside Museum has nine main display themes in its exhibition: *Streets* (with three created streets from 1895-1930, 1930-1960 and 1960-1980); *The River Clyde* (about changes to the river and how that have reflected city developments); *TranSport and Leisure* (how people use transport for leisure or sport); *Made in Scotland* (how Scottish developers influenced transport throughout Britain); *Looks and Fashion* (how taste and fashion have influenced transport design); *Crossing the World* (how transport linked Glasgow with other cities throughout the world); *Cutting Edge: Past, Present and Future* (about people's desire to travel faster, further or higher); *Disasters and Crashes* (how transport failure has affected people's lives); and *Getting There* (about the ups and downs of travelling around Scotland). Within the themes, there are more than one hundred and fifty in-depth stories (Riverside Museum: website). It is remarkable how accessible the exhibition is; there are access platforms up to many vehicles such as locomotives, trams and busses and more than ninety large touch screens with images, memories, films and games and more than twenty interactive hands-on exhibits throughout the exhibition. The touch screens provide information in several languages, including British sign language. On the ground level, most of the cars, bicycles, motorbikes, locomotives,

trams and buses are on display, with cars on a *car wall* and bicycles on a *velodrome*. The vehicles take up a lot of room both at floor level and when visitors look up - thus creates a total interaction experience in the exhibition space.

A remarkable feature is the *Main Street* display, which depicts street life from 1895-1930 in full size and is probably the most eye-catching of the three streets in the exhibition. Visitors can walk up and down the street and also enter shops like the saddle maker, cobblers, a subway, a bar, a pawn broker and a photographer where it is possible to have one's own photo taken in the style of a 1920s photograph. *Main Street* gives the museum an opportunity to focus on the history of a specific time, as seen through transport but also through objects, shopping facilities and the lives of people during 1895-1930. It is worth noting that *Main Street* is not a new feature to the museum, but rather it integrates an older part of the former displays in a totally new setting, which seems to make it very attractive to visitors in the object-focused exhibition.

On the first floor, the museum displays the impressive *Ship Conveyor*, which displays large models of ships from different time periods that rotate pass visitors whilst large screens show detailed information on each ship.



Image 11: Riverside Museum's reconstructed Main Street (Photo: Jane Nielsen, September 2012).

Although vehicles of various sorts and from many different time periods take up the most space, the exhibition also includes artworks (mainly paintings and a few decorated vehicles) to illustrate transport development as seen through the eyes of artists. Each part of the exhibition includes various forms of hands-on exhibits; it is possible to play an on-screen game with three other visitors where you have to see who can deliver the most mail to different destinations in Glasgow on a moped. In between vehicles, the exhibition also contains more traditional label exhibits with smaller objects in glass cases as well as visitor feedback stations where visitors can comment on the displays.

The Riverside Museum has daily tours led by volunteers, a *Treasure Hunt App* that leads visitors through the exhibits, as well as formal learning programmes and partnerships as part of Glasgow Museums (Riverside Museum: website).



Image 12: View of a small part of the ground floor seen from the first floor
(Photo: Jane Nielsen, September 2012).

The Riverside Museum takes a very open and inclusive approach to visitor

interaction; visitors are clearly meant to engage with every part of the vehicles on display - either directly by climbing on board or through touch-screens, online applications or interactive hands-on exhibits. Objects become active parts of the experience in this way for both children and adults and the exhibition focus is very much 'we' orientated (Simon 2010: 26-27). Visitors are regarded as *Clients* with opportunities to create their own experience (Doering 1999). This makes the experience very social as visitors often create experiences together; this goes for both children who try out some of the interactive games, and elderly adults who reminisce about past vehicles they might have owned once themselves. When walking through the exhibition it is not rare to hear an elderly voice beside you saying: "*Do you remember that car?*" or "*My father had one of those!*". Objects are very much part of the experience of evoking memories as it is through objects that both memories and new perspectives are stimulated. These remarks were often presented by members of the silent/mature or baby-boomers generation (Black 2012: 35-37), although these feelings can of course be experienced by most generations. Visitors are also allowed to climb aboard some vehicles and try out how others worked. Elements of the Cognitive experience and Intropective experience are also present as visitors participate actively in the exhibition and at the same time are given opportunities to reflect on different time periods and gain further information on specific technological parts. By touching on all these different experiences the exhibition becomes very open and accessible for all types of visitors.

Considering Fraser's four components, it is clear that the museum tries to inspire a clear identity between visitors and objects; the objects are meant to encourage both personal and social interaction no matter if visitors are interested in the historical, technological or cultural developments of transportation. One of the great powers of the museum is clearly direct object interaction, and even when this is not possible directly it is sought via touch screens or interactive hands-on elements.

At the Riverside Museum we clearly see elements of Black's object display and object-oriented exhibition approaches. However, there is also a strong element of open storage in the exhibitions; it can easily feel as if visitors are walking around an open storage interacting with all types of transport throughout history (Black 2005: 274-276). The nine display themes are there to create a feeling of a thematic exhibition approach,

however, visitors constantly walk in and out of the themes not always realising when one ends and another begins. This can seem a bit confusing if visitors try to focus on a particular thematic approach. Yet, it also creates a direct link to Ågren's story exhibition and especially the contextual exhibition with reconstructed streets and created historic settings. The exhibitions are certainly applicable to Ågren's entertainment-seeking visitors, as well as McCarthy's and Leflar's dynamic learner with many interactive and hands-on elements. However, it is also easy to gain a more detailed knowledge on both the technological and historical development of transportation or specific vehicles through touch screens or more traditional label displays. Clear elements of the analytical exhibition with a focus on technology and the use of objects and tools are therefore also present. Ågren's knowledge and understanding seeking visitors should also be mentioned as the exhibits also apply to visitors who seek further knowledge and also hope to create an understanding between objects and history (Ågren 1995). It is not necessary to have prepared much before the visit yet visitors with prior knowledge are likely to find further information on technology, history and objects. Touch screens as well as the more traditional label exhibits that can be seen in a few places throughout the exhibition require visitors to 'slow down' and read or engage in a text, object, painting or perhaps a ship model; features that apply well to both knowledge and understanding seeking visitors.



Image 13: Label texts and smaller objects in glass cases on display between vehicles, ship models and interactive touch screens (Photo: Jane Nielsen, September 2012).

Although the Riverside Museum attempts to tell the story of transportation and vehicles, it also manages to encompass elements of specific historical periods into the exhibitions. The *Main Street* exhibition is an example where the focus is on street life as well as historical trade and business life; the story of the 1920s photographer is told inside his shop in the street and once again visitors can interact directly by having their own photo taken in his studio. Different historical connections are illustrated by displaying a few historical costumes; mainly dresses and uniforms. On the first floor, the museum pays tribute to the vast ship building industry of Glasgow, focusing on ship building and technology, but also on a few of the disasters that have happened throughout history when a ship sank. The somewhat controversial element of disasters is also visible in the section *Disasters and Crashes*, which focuses on transport failures on land. Although crashes are part of transport history, the museum has chosen to embrace a somewhat controversial subject by displaying this side of the history.

Despite the large objects, the exhibition has been designed to be very flexible and easily changed. It is therefore easy to add new information or include new objects in each part of the exhibition. This is clearly a new way of thinking about exhibition

design and is of course easier to implement in a new museum building than at many older museum buildings where there might be alteration restrictions. It is likely that the inspiration from this came from the newly restored Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, which reopened in 2006 after a major refurbishment (Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum: website; Morgan 2013; Sharp 2012).

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum sought to implement a more flexible display framework that would make it possible to evolve and change displays with changing public interests and also reduce the need for future financial investment in exhibitions (Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum: website). Although the museum has experienced some negative feedback (Sharp 2012: 26), this way of thinking about the future in exhibition design is a new approach and clearly demonstrates that museums are beginning to respond to visitors' changing interests and are even beginning to implement this in their exhibition communication. This concept might challenge elements that have often been regarded as the most difficult to alter, such as permanent exhibitions, reluctance towards implementation of new technology and increased visitor participation. Wellcome Collection's head of public programmes, Ken Arnold, believes that a 'reading room' model could be envisaged; part museum and partly a concept that combines exhibition space and resource centre: "*We may eventually see a system where, through advances in personal computing, people make inquiries and curate for themselves, send pictures to their friends, or participate or organise their own events*" (Sharp 2012: 26).

The Riverside Museum has, in its own way, tried to encompass elements of storytelling, visitor participation and flexibility in the exhibitions. Visitors can make their own contribution to the exhibition texts through personal testimonies on touch screens. The museum presents over one hundred and fifty displays with more than one hundred and forty thousand words written for graphic panels and digital media. This creates a totally new importance for the exhibition texts as visitors make their own contributions public. By including multiple voices, the museum is considering and, to some degree, challenging its own role as narrator along with the position of its target audiences. The Riverside Museum has identified five very specific target groups; families with children, under-fives, teenagers, schools and sensory-impaired groups (Devine and Williams 2011: website). The approach places a strong responsibility on

the curatorial team to not only encompass key messages in each story display, but also to understand the subject and target audience in order to encourage personal participation. The Riverside Museum developed a script writing and style guide process that sought to incorporate all interpretative elements into one content development process. The museum has clearly tried to make texts, prints and digital formats, just one element of the overall museum experience as these are meant to interact with other elements as well.

The balance between interactive hands-on exhibits, objects, visitor participation and label exhibits works well at the museum. Text labels are never too heavy or long and possibilities for digital visitor testimonies make traditional label texts more approachable (Family Learning Forum: website). All types of visitors can find features that apply to them and the well-known label and glass case exhibits often provide a welcome break from participatory interactive elements. This mix of exhibition features is not easily implemented in an engaging way, but the museum has clearly focused on what works well with their objects - with both smaller objects such as tools, clothes and paintings and bigger objects like locomotives, trams and busses.

Exhibition Theories in the two Exhibitions

I have again chosen two very different case studies - not to compare them - but to demonstrate how various exhibition theories can be applied to different exhibition approaches. As with the learning theories, these analyses can be carried out at any type of museum and, as they are subjective, observers will probably reach very different conclusions. This is one of the strengths of applying exhibition and communication theories directly to museum practices: various analyses will provide museums with several possibilities of approaching visitors and presenting their collections in different settings, and visitors will have the opportunity to make meaning from a varied range of sources and settings. Museums should not and could not try to accommodate all types of visitors or communication approaches but instead try to establish which approaches work best with their collections and with the stories they want to tell. The approaches are likely to be just as subjective and individualised as the analysis of these case studies, which provides the museum with a voice of its own to enter into a dialogue with visitors.

I have tried to identify the described theories as directly as possible within the two exhibitions. However, museums rarely apply theories to their exhibition approaches in this direct way. By attempting to use the described theories, the museums' intention can become clearer and it is possible to view exhibition communication in a new way.

At Barley Hall the intention has clearly been a direct hands-on approach although not in the sense visitors might be used to it. Rather the museum has literally turned everything into an interactive hands-on experiment. For a relatively small museum, this approach can work extremely well; the museum has chosen an experimental approach in its main exhibition and can then apply well known approaches in the temporary exhibitions. The hands-on approach is of course only possible because the museum has relied heavily on replicas in the restoration process but it has clearly been a well-considered decision to create an interactive and inclusive museum experience. This idea of 'stepping' directly into history or a reconstructed historical period is often seen at open-air museums where original houses or buildings provide the main layout. The concept was created in Scandinavia towards the end of the nineteenth century. Well-known examples are *Skansen* in Stockholm, Sweden (*Skansen: website*) and *The Old Town* in Aarhus, Denmark (*The Old Town: website*).

The approach of creating a 'total history' in a single building requires different resources from the museum to secure visitor engagement. Often living history with staff dressed in historic costumes is applied; this is also used at Barley Hall at special events. On a daily basis, visitors themselves provide the 'living history'. At first, this might seem a bit confusing until visitors realise how to use the museum (which they do quickly, especially in the company of children). The museum does not have to include any kinds of new technology or interactive elements with this concept either. However, regular replacements or repair of objects that might be broken or worn out is of great importance for this concept to work. It can be difficult to gain any in-depth information on the building, its history or historical themes but the visit clearly inspires a close engagement with objects of the time, the building and its interior.

The Riverside Museum has the advantage of being a completely renewed museum in a newly designed building built especially for its collections and exhibits. The architecture of the building can seem distinct next to *The Tall Ship* in the harbour

and the old vehicles inside the building. However, the design obviously matches the layout of the themes exhibited and the interactive features.

The Riverside Museum has sought to apply many features to all parts of the exhibition. Although this might seem confusing, focus is always kept on either vehicles or the specific exhibition theme. Touch screens have the same layout so that visitors will know how to operate the following screens once having tried one, platforms up to vehicles are clearly marked and it is easy to find communication features that apply to your own individual meaning making process. Some exhibition themes and layouts are very different from each other and it therefore becomes easy to see where one begins and another ends. A very distinct feature is *Main Street* with its many shops, as well as the *Ship Conveyor* on the first floor; the layout does not leave visitors in doubt when they enter or leave these parts of the exhibition. It can otherwise be difficult for visitors to see when one theme begins and another ends. This does not necessarily interfere with the experience or the learning outcome unless visitors are seeking specific information on one historic period. The exhibition is meant to stimulate memories for elderly visitors; the nostalgic elements become clear in the displays and focus on particular cars or bicycles from popular periods of transport history. One example is the construction of Ford model T, which is regarded as the first affordable automobile for the American middle class. Another example is the characteristic British Mini, often regarded as one of the most influential modern cars. Most visitors know these vehicles and associate them with certain historic motor-eras or personal experiences. It therefore becomes natural to focus on these associations or feelings in the layout.

The exhibition at the Riverside Museum has been designed to be flexible and changeable. This allows for the museum to have as many different exhibition and learning approaches as possible without it being too confusing. However, this approach also requires the different exhibition themes to have their own clear focus on a specific story, vehicle or time period. This focus is important in these kinds of exhibitions, as the various interactive and visitor-engaging elements need a strong storyline in order to be considered essential parts of the experience. If the focus, theme or storyline is not there, interactive elements or touch screens are in risk of being ‘reduced’ to everyday elements by visitors who are already familiar with them. By including touch screens, interactive

games and hands-on elements as essential features of the stories, the museum has made sure that they are implemented as essential parts of the meaning-making experience.

Thinking about the future and even trying to prepare for it also becomes a new exhibition approach. It is possible to implement this feature in both the practical exhibition design as in exhibition theories. Interestingly, some new museum buildings have clearly begun to integrate future elements (or a certain flexibility towards change) in their approach yet we see very little of this in existing museum literature or theory; at least not in the form of specific future theories or approaches. However, as it will be discussed further in Chapter 4, many museum researchers are currently discussing and presenting new exhibition and communication theories that focus on future approaches of visitor interaction, meaning making or interpretation. Directly preparing for the future or even trying to implement it as part of the existing exhibition approaches seems to be slowly attempted when museums either undergo major refurbishments or when new museums are being build.

The need for thinking about change and how to implement it in future exhibition communication seems to come from museums themselves as they experience changing requirements. Although museological discussions at the moment are varied and present many different visitor, learning and exhibition approaches, there have not been many specific theoretical or practical approaches presented as to how future structures can be part of museum communication. Even though most of the current discussions deal with the concept of change or how museums can prepare for increasing future demands from visitors, benefactors or new museum strategies, the development of future museum communication still has no concrete or concise form. Theoretical discussions may still need to develop into more useful approaches, meanwhile it is interesting to note how museums themselves are attempting to address their future role.

Section 3: Questionnaire Analysis

Discourse Analysis: Exhibition Practice

“For all the talk about the multiplicity of object meanings, most visitors need help to bridge the communication gap between themselves and the object(s). There is no ‘right’ way to display objects and no sharp distinctions between alternatives. The challenge for the engaging museum is to develop ways that support users to observe, discuss, analyse, interpret and eventually make meanings for themselves” (Black 2012: 90).

The three following questions concentrate on exhibition practice and approaches. There is not a ‘right’ way of approaching exhibition communication and ultimately museums have to find the approaches and practices that suit them. Museums are not meant to embrace every exhibition approach or theories mentioned, but as Black mention; support visitors to make meaning and make the exhibition themes understandable and relevant.

QUESTION 4:

Does the museum use specific communication elements in the exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific storytelling techniques, etc.)?

Five of the museums who answered this question answered thusly:

Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh - Susan Gardner, Curator: *“The museum uses fairly traditional information panels and captions supported by hands-on activities wherever possible e.g. dressing-up, role play. We are limited by budget constraints”.*

Leicester Museums and Galleries - Liz Wilson, Collections, Interpretation and Learning Manager: *“Yes - we use different tools for interpretation for each of our exhibition. This include A/V DVD's i-pads applications, object handling, hands on activities, story sacks, CGI etc.”.*

The Fry Art Gallery, Essex - David Oelman, Vice Chairman/Trustee: *“We aim to*

show the best work available with the help of a catalogue”.

Museum of Science and Industry - Sarah Baines, Collections Centre Facilitator:

“All of the above. Interactive elements are used in conjunction with interpretation panels and labels. Personal stories are used wherever possible to make material engaging and interesting to visitors”.

The Orkney Museum - Tom Muir, Exhibitions Officer: *“We do use DVDs and computers within displays, but we are limited with the resources available. What I try to do, whenever possible, is to use first-hand account of events. I am also a professional storyteller, so I use my understanding and experience of using stories as a way to connect with the visitors. If it is put in terms that they can identify with, either by description or feelings of eye-witnesses, then it becomes much more real. It is no longer something that happened a long time ago but a shared experience”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Lack of funding or resources:** *“We are limited by budget constraints”, “with the help of a catalogue”, “limited with the resources available”.*
- **Diversity of technology and interpretation:** *“All of the above. Interactive elements are used in conjunction with interpretation panels and labels”, “different tools for interpretation for each of our exhibition”.*

Discussion of answers: Unsurprisingly, the larger museums seem to have more resources to provide diverse visual or technological elements in their exhibitions; often in connection with panels and labels. This seems to indicate that panels and labels are still the preferred form of exhibition communication, and technology or visual effects are seen as a supplement or as ‘something extra’. It also seems to be of importance for many museums to present a varied range of communication or interpretation elements, thus giving visitors different possibilities of creating meaning for themselves. Where this is not possible, museums seem to excuse themselves or blame their limited financial resources. Diversity in communication and interpretation therefore seem to be something museums strive for and want to be able to provide. Most museums also hold

on to more traditional and well-known elements like panels and labels, and occasionally, role-play and hands-on elements. This is not strange as this has always been one of the fundamental ways of providing information and museums are comfortable with this method. However, it can limit museums from integrating new technology, different communication effects or new techniques as essential parts of their exhibition communication. The use of technology or interactive media will always be seen by museums as a supplement to the traditional communication. Some museum curators, like Susan Gardner from Museum of Childhood, seem to be aware of this in her response calling information panels “*fairly traditional*” and blames limited budgets. Many curators are currently in a situation where they have to make the most of what they have: “*When budgets have been cut to the bone, and it’s a choice between closing venues or not refreshing displays, the displays lose out*” (Heal 2012a: 4).

Investing in new technology can be very expensive since it also involves maintenance and technological assistance when something breaks down. There seems to be a great ambivalence in how museums regard the use of new media and technology. On one hand, most museums strive for diversity and want to include interactive media as it often encourages visitor interaction. On the other hand, many museums hold on to traditional approaches like information panels and labels. The use of new technology is still seen as being a bit ‘dangerous’ by some curators, as it requires new knowledge of how to use these media and might ‘compromise’ the academic research behind collections and objects by presenting objects or themes in new ways. Also, by communicating through, for example, online features, museums reach audiences that might not have visited the museum. This also seems to be a scary prospect for many curators as they will not know how learning or knowledge is being received or used. However, most museums are also very enthusiastic about how mobile technology in particular can boost visitor engagement. In a survey conducted by the Museums Association in 2012, nearly half of the respondents stated that they offer mobile platforms; from the more traditional handheld guides to QR codes and smart phones applications (Atkinson 2012: 11). As much as museums strive for diversity in their exhibition communication, many of them still seems to have a very ambivalent relationship with it.

When asked a question like the above, most museums automatically assume that diversity is a good thing and something to strive for. In many cases it is - however, finding a specific method or approach that will work at a museum can be even more useful. Tom Muir from The Orkney Museum explains in his response how he uses storytelling techniques to help visitors engage and make meaning. For a smaller museum a somewhat direct approach like this can be of great benefit; the museum is not taking on more than it can and can simultaneously make an effort to present this way of communicating as one of their 'trademarks'. As Sarah Baines from the Museum of Science and Industry describes; sometimes the use of personal stories where the story of an individual is presented can create a more intimate communication.

Museums are well aware that visitors learn and make meaning in very different ways and this is clearly what inspires diversity in their interpretation and communication practices. However, defining what and why specific communication elements work in the exhibitions do not necessarily require diversity alone but also a profound knowledge of what may and may not work. It is easy to be enthusiastic about new technological features or new ways of telling stories but many museums seem to integrate them as part of their traditional exhibits without considering whether or not they benefit the exhibition themes, presentation or the rest of the interpretation provided. Most visitors have experienced exhibitions with traditional labels, texts and class cases and then all of a sudden a touch screen or sound effect has been put in somewhere in the exhibition as an extra interactive feature. When this happens, new media, interactive displays and technology become something 'extra' that must be provided and not an integrated part of how the museum communicates. Many visitors are understandably very fond of these features and are automatically drawn to them because they can provide a whole new range of learning and meaning-making possibilities. However, it seems clear that they work even better when they are an integral part of an exhibition design and development from the beginning. It does not necessarily have to be more expensive for museums to consider new technology or interactive features as essential parts of their exhibition communication or interpretation, nor do museums have to fill new exhibitions with new technology alone. What seems to be essential is how these features, regardless of how much exhibition space they take up, best benefit exhibition communication and encourage interaction.

QUESTION 5:

Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

Three of the museums who answered this question answered thusly:

Museum of Science and Industry - Sarah Baines, Collections Centre Facilitator:

“We have visitor comment cards and people can get in touch with our curators directly on request. However there is no official system of public consultation in the gallery development process (with the exception of the community exhibition gallery)”.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham Museums: *“Because each exhibition is different, the responses that visitors make to one exhibition generally don't have any relevance to the following exhibition. We ensure that the layout and presentation of exhibitions meets access needs - sufficient lighting, wheelchair accessibility, large size text, family friendly activity, seating, clear language. If visitors make comments which suggest positive and manageable changes that can be made during an exhibition, then we will implement them depending on resources”.*

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art and Provand's Lordship - Clare Gray, Learning and Access Curator: *“St Mungo Museum permanent galleries are unique in that the faith communities of Glasgow were consulted at the stage of creating the gallery. Where possible their wishes were met. This was not always possible, however. For instance, it was requested that the Sikh bible be displayed higher than any other bible in order to communicate its importance. As St Mungo promote equality between the religions, this was not possible. The solution was not to display a Sikh bible. The galleries display the six major faiths in Scotland. In the Life gallery the faiths are given the same size of space to show their equality”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- ***Mentioning of contact possibilities:*** *“visitor comment cards and people can get*

in touch with our curators”.

- ***Difficulties in responding to requests:*** *“Where possible their wishes were met”, “Because each exhibition is different, the responses that visitors make to one exhibition generally don't have any relevance to the following exhibition”.*

Discussion of answers: Answers to this question will inevitably differ from museum to museum. It will always be difficult to go about visitor requests because naturally not all of them can be considered, not all of them are suitable and not all of them will apply to the museum's concept. However, by considering visitors' views and wishes it can be possible to improve not only current exhibitions but also to get an idea about what might work in the next one. Of course, there might also be examples of direct requests that simply cannot be met as has been the case at St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art; Learning and Access Curator, Clare Gray explains about the episode with the Sikh Bible above. This did not coincide with the purpose and vision of the museum and therefore this request could not be met. This naturally requires that the museum has a very clear definition of what their purposes and approaches are, which can sometimes be easier for a specialised museum to define. However, it does require a thorough strategy and vision to decline a request that ends up changing the exhibition layout.

As seen at many museums nowadays, visitor requests do not necessarily have to be considered individually at museums as long as they are 'heard'. Many museums are encouraging visitors to contribute their own views, opinions or experiences to an exhibition space, either directly in the exhibitions (through comment cards, notes on the wall, etc.) or online. Although this form of interaction is often considered part of the exhibition experience, it can be a way of listening to and meeting visitor requests as well. These features often provide an excellent way for museums to find out how visitors react to and interact with a specific exhibition without asking them this question directly.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery mentions a similar approach in their answer above: *“If visitors make comments which suggest positive and manageable changes that can be made during an exhibition, then we will implement them depending on resources”*. Although this is, of course, a very subjective response that depends entirely on resources and types of requests, it is also a well known and often-used

practice at museums simply because it is manageable. It might be of greater benefit for the museum to directly include visitor response in the exhibition concept. This cannot and should not always be done, however, most visitors seem keener to take part in the exhibition through interaction and thereby state their view (directly or indirectly), than they are to complete a survey or a questionnaire form. Surveys are mainly beneficial when ‘measuring’ a particular exhibition or activity or perhaps the overall visitor opinion of a museum. Exhibition or display responses can be integrated directly into the exhibition interaction or interpretation thus giving the museum an idea about visitors’ responses, experiences and views at the same time. This requires the museum to regard visitor responses as both part of interaction and direct feedback. Visitors should be given the opportunity to interact, question and engage in a conversation with the museum through exhibition interaction. This can make visitor responses more useful as they are focused on the actual exhibitions and also open up for a direct conversation between museum and visitors.

QUESTION 6:

Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication impediments in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

Five of the museums who answered this question answered thusly:

National Museum of Piping - James Beaton, Project Manager: *“We offer audio guides in the major European languages”.*

Highland Folk Museum - Rachel Chisholm, Assistant Curator: *“We have an audio visual presentation (19mins) in five different languages. We also have some audio in buildings”.*

Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh - Susan Gardner, Curator: *“We are sometimes able to offer handling sessions for the visually impaired. The Council offers a*

translation service on request but this is probably not practical for museum visitors. Space for printed material is already limited so it would be difficult to provide information in other languages. In a city like Edinburgh with visitors from all over the world, which languages would you pick and how many? Audio guides and other forms of technological communication are prohibited by cost”.

Museum of Science and Industry - Sarah Baines, Collections Centre Facilitator:

“All galleries are DDA 2010 compliant as per museum policy. Large print information is available. Front of house staff are trained in assisting visitors with different accessibility needs”.

The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester - Henry McGhie, Head of

Collections and Curator of Zoology: *“ -yes- have audio described tours available, development of text and images takes notice of needs of intended audiences (which are generally aimed at non-specialist adult for adult themed shows, or for other visitor groups depending on the show). Have used audio guides. Web materials developed with recognition of visitors with special needs”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Translation possibilities:** *“audio guides in the major European languages”, “visual presentation (19mins) in five different languages”, “translation service on request”.*
- **Use of staff and websites:** *“handling sessions for the visually impaired”, “Front of house staff are trained in assisting visitors with different accessibility needs”, “Web materials developed with recognition of visitors with special needs”.*

Discussion of answers: Many museums seem to be focusing on translation possibilities; for museums with many tourists from different countries this will be a natural approach. Besides following legal procedures and policies on disability access, most museums also seem to offer audio guides and large print formats as alternatives to traditional label writings. Often museums are limited financially from offering the

accessibility they wish. However, it also seems as if many museums are not actually sure which accessibility features to offer, Susan Gardner from Museum of Childhood mentions their problems with choosing which languages to translate and also talks about limited resources to offer other forms of technological communication.

When providing access, most museums also acknowledge the importance of well-trained staff assisting visitors with special needs. This direct contact is still preferred although individual assistance requires a lot of resources from the museum. Fundamentally, providing proper accessibility features requires museums to know their audience very well; what kinds of visitors come to the museum? How easy/difficult is it to get around? What do people ask - what are they missing? Which languages do they speak? And so on. For some museums these questions will be easier to answer than others. It is of course not possible to meet all requirements as Susan Gardner from Museum of Childhood mentions in her reply; *“which languages would you pick and how many?”*. Also, most museums will have a direct accessibility policy to go by. Nevertheless, providing access and considering visitors with particular learning or communication impediments has to be an important part of exhibition communication.

One approach is to directly include visitors with particular impediments as a target audience as seen at the Riverside Museum (Devine and Williams 2011: website). The museum has chosen sensory-impaired visitors as one of their target groups; this give the museum the opportunity to get to know this particular group of visitors very well and apply displays, communication and interaction to the experiences of sensory-impaired visitors.

One mental and physical challenge most museum visitors will face from time to time is known as ‘museum fatigue’, which even museum professionals succumb to sometimes: *“We start off viewing every element of an exhibition but gradually speed up and by the end are rushing through”* (Black 2012: 92). Visitors simply run out of energy and lose concentration. There are actually many things museums can do to minimise this; visitors must be allowed to focus on what is important. Visitors have to be given the opportunity to easily choose and locate what matters to them from everything on offer. Therefore, maps or clear signs are essential. Other challenges to consider are heat and noise, lack of seating, overcrowding, access from one floor to another, walking distance in and between exhibitions and so on. Another very important

aspect is clarifying themes, content and layout in exhibitions. This will not only clarify why the exhibition is relevant, what to see and how to experience it, but will also create better orientation for visitors because they are allowed to focus on what matters to them. It will also reduce the risk of stimulus overload when too many objects, collections, media, events and experiences are competing with each other. With a good layout and planning, the museum can actually reduce distraction or confusion and make it easy for visitors to find what they want. We also see tendencies towards museum fatigue when labels get too long or too confusing to read. Museums have to consider how fatigue can be minimised in all aspects of exhibition creation. This will also encourage social interaction and allow visitors to focus for longer thus supporting engaged and increased attention.

Summary of Chapter 3

Although museums are clearly influenced by exhibition or visitor theories as well as learning theories they often develop new individual ways of approaching these in their exhibitions. This is not only a result of collections, buildings or settings being different but also due to the flexibility of how these theories can be interpreted in museum practice. The most useful exhibition theories are therefore those that can be implemented and transferred directly into a relevant exhibition and communication practice. Some theories or approaches even become such an integrated part of exhibition creation that curators are rarely aware of how much they use them. This can of course be a resource as well as a disadvantage depending on how they are developed over time. Nevertheless it is important that theories continue to develop alongside exhibition and communication practices in order to continue the enhancement of both.

As the two case studies from Barley Hall and the Riverside Museum demonstrate the building, rooms and layout are main factors in the implementation of specific exhibition approaches; these elements often create feelings, evoke memories and stimulate prior knowledge or experiences. They also determine the circumstances under which learning and meaning making take place. These are circumstances that the museum itself can create and turn into key factors of its learning, meaning making and visitor experiences.

Exhibition, communication and learning theories are of course mostly combined

and intertwined in exhibitions although I have tried to separate learning theories from exhibition theories in chapters 1 and 3. Museums rarely have all these different theories in mind during exhibition or programme creation, although they are clearly aware of their influence and importance. However, by looking at some of these theories separately, their influences as well as history and implementation in exhibition developments become much clearer. Both exhibition and learning theories can also be viewed as useful ‘tools’ for museums to review, form or evaluate their current and coming exhibitions according to their existing strategies or programmes. The case studies do not only demonstrate how specific theories or approaches might be used or implemented at particular museums, but also form a view of how exhibition theories and practices are developing.

The need for change or flexibility in exhibition design is beginning to develop in various forms at new museum buildings or during restorations. Although these thoughts are not new in literary discussions or museum research, they have not actually taken a specific form or direction yet. Museums are, however, clearly beginning to experiment with these elements and are therefore creating useful ‘case studies’ in and of themselves for future practices and approaches. The curiosity and willingness to experiment can again be viewed as part of postmodern developments, developments of new educational approaches of museum staff and/or as a result of current museological discussions of participatory and interactive necessities. Nonetheless, it provides an interesting perspective to how museum learning, communication and interaction are developing.

It is also interesting to view these tendencies in specific case studies compared to how museums themselves view their exhibition practices in the questionnaire. Although museums often blame financial circumstances, most museums try to present as varied an exhibition approach as possible. This indicates that most museums are aware of the importance of flexibility although they do not always feel they have proper resources to implement it. One way of improving flexibility or changing views is through the implementation of, and openness towards visitor requests, opinions or views.

It is still very difficult for most museums to find a useful way of considering visitor requests. Naturally not all suggestions can or should be approached yet the feeling of placing your own view or experience as part of an exhibition can create a very

strong feeling of interaction in most visitors. This can be done in many different ways; through everything from hands-on elements, digital touch screens to visitor cards or surveys. It is an important part of the experience to have 'a voice' or even enter into a dialogue with other visitors or the museum itself. At best, this interaction creates new means for flexibility and change for both museum and visitors.

Museums have always sought to be places of access for all types of visitors. This is often one of the biggest challenges. Not only do museums have to consider which groups of people to service but also how this is best done. Museums situated in original houses naturally have a problem, as most buildings are not suited for e.g. wheelchair users. Another issue that seems to concern many museums is language translation; not just which languages to translate information into, but also how these should be presented. Some museums still have very long label texts with two or three languages next to each other; others are beginning to offer translations as part of interactive elements. Creating a flexible exhibition environment and presenting as varied an exhibition communication as possible can seem a useful approach to accommodate visitors with various accessibility or communication difficulties. Even if an exhibition feature is not directly created to suit e.g. wheelchair users or sensory-impaired visitors it is often possible to create sustainable visitor experiences for these visitors through a variation of communication features. Flexibility within an exhibition also includes using exhibition features for different purposes and functions. Although museums do not always know how to approach this, most museums seem keen to do it.

Chapter 4:

Museum Communication and Museological Development

Section 1: Museological Discussions of Change

Introduction: Discussing Museums

The discussion of new developments within museum communication and structures has never been more compulsive or varied than it has been at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Development and experimentation with new approaches is often described in museological literature and museum practice, as will be discussed in this section. The discussions revolve around new scenarios that shape the present and the future of museology - be it within the possibilities and challenges of interpretation, philosophy, history, meaning-making, interaction or learning.

This chapter will present a brief overview of the different discussions, scenarios and approaches that have been put forward over the past decades. The ongoing discussions on development in the museological literature, as well as the ways in which many museums attempt to create new unique communication settings, are changing the current museological understanding and forming new structures for future museology. The first section of this chapter will attempt to clarify how the museological discussion is presently developing and how it might develop in the future by debating and analysing the ongoing debates and museums' own attempts to develop new approaches. Section 2 will introduce a particular perspective to the existing debate by looking at how new aspects of storytelling can transform the current understanding of communication internally and externally at museums. Section 2 also includes an interview with Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Donald Smith, who debates these issues in terms of museum communication.

A 'new' Museum

“At the beginning of the twenty-first century, museums are re-orientating themselves through imagining afresh what they can become; familiar practices are being reassessed and tired philosophies are being overturned. New ideas about culture and society and new policy initiatives challenge museums to rethink their purposes, to account for their performances and to redesign their pedagogies” (Hooper-Greenhill 2007b: 1).

Museums have had to rethink their purposes during the last few decades. There are

various reasons for this; political, financial, social, cultural and educational. The modern museum gradually became a fully established form with strong features that are still dominant in today's museums. Research Professor of Humanities in the Centre for Cultural Research at University of Western Sydney, Bob Hodge, argues that linear communication models are still alive and well even in what he describes as "*The New Museum*" and asks the question: "*Has the revolution really happened?*" (Hodge 2011: 109). Hodge argues that the revolution against linearity so far only co-exists with an effective continuation of linear communication models (Hodge 2011: 109). However, the discussion and re-orientation towards new approaches is not new: "*The question we must ultimately ask ourselves is this: do our museums make a real difference in, and do they have a positive impact on, the lives of other people?*" (Weil 1994: 89).

The main reason that this discussion is taking place seems to be that museum professionals generally feel that they are, in one way or another, failing their purposes or perhaps failing to see their museums' potentials in a fast-changing world. Arguments also seem to balance between those who favour changes in museums and those who believe museums will fail their purposes by embracing too many changes. The development of the postmodern museum can be viewed as an attempt to establish potential and create both theoretical and practical approaches in which the concept is useful. Robert R. Janes, Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* sums up some of the dilemmas that museums face (and sometimes put up for themselves) in his publication, *Museums in a Troubled World* (Janes 2009). He discusses some of the troubling questions of irrelevance and lack of purpose that museums often struggle with. He argues that museums have lived a privileged existence as "... *agenda-free and respected custodians of mainstream cultural values - not ever truly wealthy, but mostly comfortable, and certainly not beholden to the incessant demands of the so-called real world*" (Janes 2009: 16). Janes believes that the failure to ask *why* museums do as they do discourages self-critical reflection. Instead the focus of the discussion has mainly been on *how* - referring to the processes of collection and preserving (Janes 2009: 15-17; 2013). Museums should instead begin to reflect on why they are indeed privileged institutions: "*Most importantly, museums are privileged because they are organizations whose purpose is their meaning*" (Janes 2009: 16). Janes also notes how future tendencies are rare subjects for museums to touch upon.

Although this might be understandable for institutions whose focus is mainly on the past, Janes describes this as being slightly schizophrenic “*as museums rush to install the latest technological wizardry or attach whimsical architectural appendages to their buildings*” (Janes 2009: 17). He believes that the future requires serious reflection simply because it is not knowable (Janes 2009: 17; 2013). These issues of reflection, meaning, and future thinking pose questions regarding future challenges for museums. It can be argued that museums throughout the world face some of the same challenges to create sustainable learning environments, provide possibilities for meaning-making, ensure visitor interaction and participation, and provide flexibility towards new thinking as well as future perspectives. These challenges - in all their various aspects - form the core of current museological discussions.

Developing new Museological Perspectives

The discussions of new museological perspectives have also sparked the development of new approaches in literature; not just as a result of discussing already existing museum practices but various attempts to renew or develop a totally new museum frame have been presented. These do not only include input into how museums should or could approach challenges or possibilities. Rather, some of these new ideas directly attempt to create long-lasting museum structures that can help shaping the future.

Within a fast-changing world, increasing media openness and greater focus on and tolerance towards difference in all aspects of society, there is no doubt that museums are facing new perspectives. These may come in the shape of a new episteme of new values, innovations, practices and philosophies. Its name or structure might still be under development, however, a new episteme or understanding is inevitable to follow both modern and postmodern values and perspectives. Some of the new perspectives on how to forge museology and create new museum approaches will be discussed further in this section. Various researchers have put their contribution forward in the debate and some of their perspectives will form the following discussions.

Discussing Museological Approaches

Hooper-Greenhill has, through a number of publications, discussed and developed historical, cultural and particularly educational perspectives that have and continue to

influence the museum sector (Hooper-Greenhill 1989; 1992; 2000; 2007b). The main element in most of Hooper-Greenhill's publications is how to create and make meaning. Although this is often linked to aspects of interpretation or understanding, it has been at the very centre of most museological literature over the past twenty to thirty years. The focus has specifically been on how to make meaning from collections and exhibitions, and how to make this knowledge relevant in today's society. Museums have undergone a long journey from being institutions of education and knowledge to being institutions of learning, narrative and difference. This has also been interpreted as a journey through Modernism to Postmodernism. However, even a postmodern museum tolerant of difference and change will need to move forward, perhaps now more than ever. Whether focusing on postmodernism, learning, experience, interpretation, interaction or meaning-making, the museological discussion also poses the questions: Where are museums going from here? Where will the next big phase of learning, interaction and experience take museums? There are many perspectives that seek to clarify this: "*The biggest challenge facing museums at the present time is the conceptualisation of the museum/audience relationship. After almost a century of rather remote relationships between museums and the public, museums today are seeking ways to embrace their visitors more closely*" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 1). The relationship between museums and visitors posed the first big challenge in the meaning-making process. It was also a key subject in most of the literature that followed; how can museums encourage and develop understanding and meaning-making through a closer visitor relationship?

In 2005, Graham Black published *The Engaging Museum. Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement*, which begins with the statement: "*It is a wonderful time to be working in museums - at long last audiences are being given the priority they deserve*" (Black 2005: ix). The focus on visitors is beginning to show across museums and in academic discussions. However, at both universities and museums there is also a renewed focus on the education of future museum staff to rethink museum-visitor relationships. During the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, new post-graduate courses in museum and heritage studies experienced a great increase in students particularly because the need for new thinking in museum communication became greater than ever. This new way of thinking about communication and visitors also meant a break with some traditional museum approaches and sometimes even

provoked a clash between new and older generations of museum staff (Candlin 2012; Johnson 2005; Kidd 2011; Marwick 1995). Perhaps because new approaches often involve interdisciplinary work and consulting experts from outside the museum sector:

“The reluctance to use consultants and knowledgeable outsiders to tap different, and perhaps contradictory, perspectives to stimulate internal rethinking may be the result of professional conceit or insecurity among senior staff, but the consequences are the same - the loss of untapped internal knowledge and creativity with which to build institutional renewal” (Janes 2009: 15).

This is perhaps the challenge discussed most in recent literature; i.e. museums’ reluctance towards change or trying new things. Of course it cannot be put down to differences in thinking between younger and senior staff alone. However, working interdisciplinary with different businesses to improve or change the internal approach does ‘clash’ with the traditional way of thinking museums. There seems to be a fear, not just towards change, but towards whether or not academic research into collections is being compromised by the interpretation and communication of the same collections. Most academically trained museum staff have never learned to cover every aspect of interpretation, engagement and communication, while preserving, analysing and researching - simply because these various concepts have never been studied simultaneously before. Although the discussions on how to remedy this are many and varied, it is still one of the main challenges that museum communication (both internal and external) must face. Many museums seem to be aware of this, yet they have not been able to find a way to accommodate both ways of thinking. According to some researchers this is because it is not (and should not be) possible for the traditional way of approaching knowledge to survive when introducing new communication features. Of course, no one who is working in or with museums wants to compromise collection preservation, field work or research. However, failing to communicate collection work will result in museums becoming irrelevant institutions with no purpose. This also means that a museum’s success (or lack thereof) depends on how well it interacts with visitors. Most recent museum literature has taken up the challenge of approaching ways of renewing, rethinking and/or reinventing internal communication, learning and interaction structures.

In her book, *The Participatory Museum* (Simon 2010), Simon discusses what is required for a museum to become a place for participatory engagement. She mentions

that all participatory projects are based on the following three institutional values:

- *“Desire for the input and involvement of outside participants*
- *Trust in participants’ abilities*
- *Responsiveness to participants’ actions and contributions”* (Simon 2010: 183).

Simon states that the challenge is to find the participatory model that works best for one’s own institution or project, something which is done by understanding the potential structures for participation (Simon 2010: 184). Simon sets up a model for museums to follow that depends on the amount of influence and control they want to have on visitors’ participation. She defines four different types of institutions: contributory, collaborative, co-creative and hosted (Simon 2010: 190-191). Understanding how and which type of participatory engagement a museum wants to have is the first step towards designing participatory and engaging projects. Simon also concludes that working towards participation presents an ideal opportunity for any museum to examine the mission statement and consider which phrases that should be emphasised in the future (Simon 2010: 192). Museums should also consider the benefits for visitors and according to Simon there are three basic approaches to contributory projects:

- *“Necessary contribution, in which the success of the project relies on visitors’ active participation*
- *Supplemental contribution, in which visitors’ participation enhances an institutional project*
- *Educational contribution, in which the act of contribution provides visitors with skills or experiences that are mission-relevant”* (Simon 2010: 207).

There is naturally a high risk and a high investment for the museum when creating projects that require visitor contribution to succeed. This is another reason for many museums being reluctant towards higher visitor participation; do they have the necessary resources to provide to a project and are visitors going to participate at all? As Simon mentions, there are many examples of museums that have experienced great success in their exhibitions, projects or learning practices when they have contributed

themselves (Simon 2010: 207-219).

This also presents the returning question of collaborating with communities and creating new partnerships for museums; the closer a relationship is, the higher the chance for participation. Watson briefly describes a tool kit produced by Yorkshire Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in 2004 that identified a number of principles of involvement relating to access and participation (Watson 2007: 17):

- Museums have to understand the communities they are working with; composition, needs, priorities, tensions, strengths, existing networks, etc.
- Understanding the need for partnerships in all stages of a networking process as well as recognising the importance of long-term involvement is essential.
- Understanding how to encourage the often fragile representation structures and build on networks that strengthen communities rather than dividing them.
- Creating a wider range of ways for people to participate and create a sense of community ownership and engagement.
- Recognising the importance of community influence.
- Recognising that people participate from a wide range of starting points and cultural experiences and this will have implications for how people contribute (Watson 2007: 17).

Watson also recognises the danger of working closely with one community group as it can lead to the exclusion of another (Watson 2007: 17). Traditionally, museums in the UK have been good at adopting methods of representing various community groups and providing accessibility; this often involves contributions from volunteers at museums. There is no doubt that working as a volunteer at a museum cannot only be extremely interesting but might also provide a nice career step into the business for future staff. However, the use of volunteers is currently experiencing criticism at a number of museums. On 24 September 2012 the Museums Association made it possible to post online career questions to their panel of experts (Museums Association - Careers Q&A: website) and the question of volunteers in museums was

discussed as a way of improving careers but also as an impediment as volunteers are often accused of keeping salaries down and even doing the work of many professionals. In question 2 of the questionnaire (Appendix 1.3) some museums mentioned the use of volunteers as one of their main resources. Using volunteers can be an effective way of engaging visitors in museum work, providing closer partnerships with certain groups and encouraging cultural interests. However, the balance between using volunteers as essential elements of a museum's work and engaging community groups is clearly being obscured during this period of financial hardship (Barrett 2011; Groninger 2011; Locke 1995).

An interesting discussion closely related to this debate was posted by Nina Simon on Museum 2.0's website (Simon 2012: website). In the blog she posed the question: "*Is the gender imbalance in the arts a problem?*" (Simon 2012: website). Simon - who was director of a female-run museum when the blog was posted, argues that, even though issues with racial and ethnic diversity in museums deserve more attention, the fact that more women than men are educated and working in the arts might become a problem for museums in the future. There seems to be a strong tendency towards more women than men applying for jobs at museums. A female-run museum is likely to approach issues of partnerships, learning, communication, exhibition design, participation, etc. differently than a male-run or a mixed-gender run museum. Posting a blog that seeks to discuss these work patterns also indicates an increased openness towards discussing their own structures, as well as how their organisational composition might affect daily work and partnerships.

There are many ways of approaching both theoretical museological discussions of current and future museum practices. During the last few decades the discussions have revolved around the subject of visitor involvement, participation, and interaction, meaning-making, creating relevant experiences and communicating museum purposes. These discussions influence both external and internal museum communication, and often challenge current museum structures, policies and strategies. It is not possible to go into detail about every aspect of these theoretical and practical approaches, but the next section will examine a few of these approaches, as well as present an overview of

how they have developed and are developing. However, the increasing openness from many museums towards their own purposes and positions, the development of digital media and online communication possibilities and alterations in both political and organisational museum structures are creating new museological perspectives for museums as well as researchers.

An unknown number of websites, associations and centres have introduced their own approaches, conferences and workshops for the future of museum practices, as new interdisciplinary network partnerships are developing across cultural disciplines (Center for the Future of Museums: Website; Communicating the Museum: website; Engage: website; Group for Education in Museums: website; ICOFOM: website; MuseumsNext: website; National Association for Museum Exhibition: website; The Strategic Museum: website). New online features are created and added frequently and many of them deal with communication, future strategies or new strategic compositions of museum administration and organization. Added to these are a number of online discussions groups some created on social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and public blogs. This bodes well for the openness and development of museum practices and theories. However, museums still seem to suffer from public stereotypes of how or what they should be, which can pose a challenge in discussions of future possibilities.

Discussing the Future

“Museums should help us to live better lives, but they are little more than dead libraries for the creations of the past” (de Botton 2011: website). In January 2011, writer and presenter Alain de Botton published this criticism against museums as part of BBC Radio 4’s broadcast, *A point of view*. Expressing such a direct point of view naturally sparks a lot of discussion and argument - yet the notion seemed to hit a nerve in the museological discussion that had already been going on for some time. Chief arts writer for the Guardian, Charlotte Higgins, replied: *“... bland, academic and failing to speak to our souls? Personally, I’d rather they spoke to the intellect, and let the soul take care of itself”* (Higgins 2011: website). This discussion is interesting in a number of ways and seems to sum up the current museological debate very well. Firstly, because many people still seem to think of museums as ‘dead libraries’ that do not speak directly to visitors nor seek to communicate relevant or meaningful information. Secondly,

because others seem to believe that museums are meant to be places of learning and education speaking only to visitors' intellects. It takes a long time to change these views in the mind of visitors and museums have been struggling with as well as thriving on these assumptions for a long time. However, we also see how museums begin to discuss their own role in connection with these debates. Radio curator, Kathy Cremin, believes that museums think too little about the intangible heritage; i.e. the feelings, stories and rituals that determine how we make meaning: *"Being devoted to museums feels like sticking with a lover who can't remember if you like Marmite or not. It's a one-sided affair, and even though our conversations sound like conversations, only one of us is listening"* (Cremin 2013: website). She argues that new technology is often used as a smokescreen where museums pretend to listen but essentially the communication is still one-sided: *"... no amount of digital technology can enable this conversation unless our mission is clear and followed"* (Cremin 2013: website). Museums are essentially not built to listen and yet it is only by listening that museums can grow in connectivity (Cremin 2013: website).

We begin to see questions about the future raised directly in museum exhibitions. These tendencies can be discussed in a number of ways as the following examples will demonstrate - they also provide clues as to how museums can approach future perspectives in their practices.

Museum of Life

In March and April 2010 the BBC programme *Museum of Life* went behind the scenes of the Natural History Museum in London in six episodes exploring the varied work of the museum (*Museum of Life*: website). In the final episode, *A Collection for the Future* the programme raises questions about the future use and relevance of the museum by directly exploring how collections, research and visitor communication can influence future generations. The programme concluded that each generation of both staff and visitors see the museum in a new light and will explore its collections and exhibitions in their own ways - that will ensure a new purpose to be created in every generation.

An interesting feature in the final programme of the series is the presentation of a former BBC programme made in the 1970s about the Natural History Museum. *A Collection for the Future* shows a few clips from the old programme where staff are

discussing renewing the exhibitions that they find are not created for ordinary people but for scientists (*Museum of Life*: website). They generally believe them to be outdated and show examples where objects, like birds and beetles, are presented in glass cases with their Latin names. This created a move towards exhibitions with very few original objects but with focus on entertainment and interaction. However, during the next two decades a balance between the two approaches seemed to be established. A few of the old exhibition cases are kept today to show how collections were displayed during the 1970s. The clips were interesting as they did not just show how exhibition and visitor communication were discussed and considered forty years ago, but also how future tendencies were considered in connection with collections and research (Hoskins 1998).

The programme also set out to explore exactly how the museum could benefit future generations of both professionals and visitors. A key feature was the use of technology and how it could enable objects to be displayed in both their original and in totally new ways. Examples included CT scans of animals, digital reconstructions and even how new technology could solve old mysteries of objects that have been kept in the collections for years without anyone being able to determine their use or origin.

By exploring direct future questions of its collections, research and representation, the museum does not only debate its own relevance but also future use. Such questions might be easier for a large national museum to find answers to than for a smaller museum. Nevertheless, such questions enable the museum to explore its own collections in totally new perspectives. For many museums it could be an eye-opener to start this process by identifying key objects, themes, connections, etc. in collections and exhibitions that will change or have changed the future. These objects or discoveries can provide a museum with many possibilities to exploring its own future, view its own relevance for society and exhibit those subjects that can be researched and exhibited in years to come.

Museums 2020

Museums 2020 was introduced by Museums Association as an initiative “to create a bold vision for UK museums and their impact - the difference museums can have on individuals, communities, society and the environment” (Museums Association - *Museums 2020*: website). The discussion invites museum staff, funders, policy-makers,

researchers, stakeholders and so on to think about the role of museums both presently and in the future. The initiative involves consultations, discussions among professionals, and input from individuals, as well as workshops and MA conferences in Edinburgh (2012) and in Liverpool (2013), where future perspectives were essential parts of the agenda. It also involves a consultation paper where existing ideas, research and key trends in museums are presented along with debates of where museums might be heading (Museums Association - Consultation Paper: website). Input and discussions were collected during 2012 and then made part of *Museum Vision 2020* (Museums Association: website). The discussions represented a wide range of challenges and opportunities. They began by posing a set of questions for museums to consider and discuss through a range of discussion topics:

- 1) **Making a difference for individuals.** Firstly, museums are encouraged to think about how they can improve the lives of individuals, stimulate social interaction, support learning and build skills and abilities. Museums are asked how they can make a greater difference to individuals and how they can improve individual wellbeing - the discussion encourages them to look at their potential and how it can be developed.
- 2) **Making a difference for communities.** Museums are encouraged to strengthen communities by bringing people together and support community organizations. They are asked how they can become closer to communities and how they can better involve people as participants in their exhibitions, programmes and decision-making.
- 3) **Making a difference for society.** Museums are asked how they can better develop their collections and the creation of knowledge to increase their contribution to society and cultural life. This involves thinking about social differences and justice, equality and human rights.
- 4) **Making a difference to the environment.** Museums can care for their environment as well as collections and are encouraged to reduce energy and help

people to consider more sustainable ways of living. They are asked how they can support or promote ways of living that are less damaging to the environment (Museums Association - Consultation Paper: website).

These discussions present both challenges and opportunities for museums to consider. Museums are asked which impacts should be the main focus of their work in 2020, what might be the main barriers to achieving those impacts and if it might require staff and funders to act differently. An interesting question of the discussion deals with how museums might make a difference to individuals, communities, society and the environment overall - and whether or not there should be less emphasis on attracting increasing visitor numbers to permanent displays. So far, a museum's success has mostly been measured by visitor numbers, although engaging elements of museum experiences encompasses much more. Museums may partly change this focus themselves, particularly by thinking differently about how space is allocated within museums (Museums Association - Consultation Paper: website).

Museums are also encouraged to take more risks and be more comfortable with controversy as this can be part of their potential too. It will require museums to work differently, develop new skills and potentials and focus on the quality of engagement and depth of impact (Harris 1995). The idea of these discussions and questions is to make more museums become responsive and socially engaged. Museums and individuals were asked to contribute with views on these discussions as part of *Museum Vision 2020* (Museums Association - Consultation Paper: website).

Although these themes are certainly worth considering for any museum, a specific criticism has to be raised. The consultation document rarely raises questions that directly apply to museums. In fact, the points outlined may apply to many other types of organizations or institutions. That does not mean that museums should not or could not consider these aspects. However, by adding considerations directly concerning, e.g. collections, research, conservation, communication or exhibitions the document would have touched upon subjects that distinguish museums from other organizations, thus having focused on the uniqueness and specialties of museum work. Nothing less would have been expected from an organisation whose primary purpose is to advocate for museum development. It therefore seems obvious to have either focused

on a specific type of museum when asking these questions or try to somehow articulate a different set of questions for each of the varied categories of museums connected to the Museums Association's work. This would not only have made the aims of the document and the questions more concise, it would also have created a more direct approach for museums to consider. As it is, some of the themes will naturally apply more to certain types of museums - perhaps mainly bigger museums - while smaller museums will have to find their own approach around these topics.

At the Museum Association's Conferences in 2012 and 2013, these themes were on the agenda for further discussion; the vision was to take museums out of their comfort zones and ask difficult questions in a forum where museums could be comfortable debating them (Museums Association - Conference). The conferences clearly sought to encourage museums to take up more challenges and engage with controversy by discussing social and political subjects too. Amongst other topics, museums in Scotland were encouraged to engage in debating Scottish independence as this is not only relevant for most Britons, but can also prove to be a discussion where museums can engage with every aspect of their cultural, historical, social and political potential (Museums Association - Conference).

Discussions on the future also raised some interesting questions for museum professionals to consider: 1) future museum education 2) environmental change 3) sharing collections, knowledge and decision-making 4) how to understand ones assets and where to supply resources 5) how to create motivation and focus on a special visitor experience, etc. Issues of futurology were on the conference agenda in 2013 where one of the major themes was 'Tomorrow's World'. This theme debated what will be needed by museums in the future and how museums need to adapt. (Museums Association - Conference). Many professionals seemed keen for their museums to keep their uniqueness although they often found it difficult to define what exactly that encompassed. Most professionals did, however, recognize the need for taking risks in the future.

Another important part of *Museums 2020* was a series of workshops held throughout the UK (Museums Association - Museums 2020 - Workshop Discussions: website). These workshops identified important further discussion themes about future roles, challenges and opportunities for museums. Discussions quickly began to revolve

around certain key themes (e.g. taking risks, measuring success, participation and partnerships, collections and the role and impact of museum). The discussions do not only reflect patterns in which museums still seem to be stuck, but have also identified areas where museums want to improve, but often know they have not been successful. Discussions of approaches often vary as museums have had mixed experiences. However, discussions in themselves seem to have one of the most profound effects on how museum thinking is developing at the moment.

Museum Communication Strategy

Although museums pride themselves on communicating with their visitors, the majority do not have an official communication strategy or policy - and if they do, the strategies mostly seem to concentrate on external communication concerning the media or press contact. It may seem strange that not many museums have thought about these issues and subjects from a practical perspective. However, it would appear that the concept of communication can only make its way into museum practice through a direct policy or strategy defined by the individual museum: *“The challenge in such a document is to outline the ways through which the museum will seek to encourage its visitors to engage with its collections and displays. It is a combination of interpretive principles and very practical outcomes”* (Black 2005: 246). Black outlines the potential contents of a communication strategy with a clear focus on visitors and users (Black 2005: 247). Thus a communication strategy essentially becomes the *why, what, who, when, where* and *how* of relaying information. A clear strategy can help museums plan related communication with visitors and target audiences. It can even provide a structure for events, it can help museums to think about and plan community involvement, it can develop methods and approaches to deliver information and ensure rapid information exchange in both visitor and partnership communication. As seen in the questionnaire responses (particularly question 3), most museums have a clear learning or community involvement policy. Surprisingly, these rarely include basic visitor, exhibition or engagement communication as most museums seem to associate communication with media or outreach contact alone.

There is no doubt that most museums can benefit enormously from a clear communication strategy or policy (Hatton 1994; Hudson 1994; Kotler and Kotler 1998;

Tibbs 2011). Considering the use of communication in museums, a strategy's aim should be to provide information, increase awareness, encourage interaction, change behaviour and perspectives and promote community and visitors participation. In doing so museums can:

- 1) Identify potential audiences and consider the varied audiences who are likely to attend events.
- 2) Consider options when, where and for what purpose messages are best delivered.
- 3) Consider communication within displays and how to convey ideas and meanings.
- 4) Outline display possibilities in context with aims, target groups and collections.

Museums can even consider individual elements of exhibition and activity outlines, events and interaction through a communication strategy. Methods and 'tools' for museum communication include a varied range of elements - from briefings, exhibitions, internet, mailing information, presentation, public notices, telephone, public meetings, special events, video shows, informal activities, interdisciplinary and cross-cultural communications and of course the use of social media - therefore a strategy on how to connect these elements in the most beneficial ways will enhance the overall communication.

It is also important to stress that a communication strategy should not be too complicated - it should never replace the process of actually communicating with visitors and it has to be flexible as communication changes faster than anything else at museums. Through a direct strategy museums have the opportunity to sub-divide the above mentioned discussion themes and turn them into useful practical approaches focusing on their individual circumstances, potentials and aims.

A communication strategy should also encompass the circumstances of internal communication at a museum; how the structures of different departments and staff are outlined, how communication 'flows' in the organisation and who is responsible for the final decision-making processes are all vital elements to secure a clear communication strategy. The internal communication between staff and departments will influence visitor communication too. Therefore, museums should consider how they approach all

aspects of their communication.

Structures for interaction and communication are changing very fast - and will continue to do so in the future. Many museums can secure a stable and clear communication structure through a strategy - and the clearer a strategy the easier will it be to encompass future changes.

Changing Needs

Museum communication encompasses every aspect of museum work as well as influences theoretical frameworks used to establish museums' history, present and future. Learning, interpretation, analyses, philosophical, epistemological, sociological and historical aspects of museums will influence museological opinions and discussions. This is an enormous strength in the debate of change although it can make it difficult to find a clear focus. So far discussions and debates have focused on as varied issues as:

- Visitor focus and audience orientation
- Interdisciplinary thinking and implementation
- Forming partnerships and new cooperation
- The use of volunteers vs. professionals
- If prioritizing communication and interaction might 'compromise' collection management, research and conservation
- Use of new technology and social media in exhibitions and online
- If museums should focus on 'bigger' issues such as climate change, social injustice, current political debates, etc. as it might help museums become more social entrepreneurial
- Taking risks by increasing visitor participation both inside and outside the museum as well as online
- Being comfortable with critique and willing to question own purpose and relevance
- Challenging assumptions about what can take place in museums and how visitors can make an impact to promote innovation

- Preparing for future challenges and opportunities as well as thinking long-term
- How to measure success and define ‘uniqueness’ of the museum business compared to other cultural businesses
- Focussing on creating an ‘authentic’ visitor experience or an interactive experience - and if one excludes the other
- Exhibition, events and online themes of museum communication

These issues naturally raise many sub-issues that make the debate very complex. They all influence visitor, research, exhibition and/or learning aspects of museum communication. However, they all seem to have one thing in common; an awareness of both the historic traditions that museums carry and of preparation of possibilities and challenges of the future. Historic challenges and possibilities of development have already been discussed through philosophical, epistemological, educational and social theories. These may not be new but hold an important understanding of how museums work at the present and will in the future. Defining a future framework is a matter of long-term development and will require a wide discussion both theoretical, literary and practically at museums. With so many different discussion subjects on the table the discussion will be a complex one - yet, attempts on how to approach it have been underway for some time (Deeth 2012; Roppola 2012; Rounds 2012).

A new aspect of communication is the stories that unfold in a museum; not just as part of visitor communication but throughout the entire museum. This type of communication involves internal as well as external interaction and forms the most important part of the practical communication.

Section 2: Communicating Stories

Storytelling

Part of the museological discussion revolves around how creativity and motivation can be communicated and enhanced. As the discussions of learning theories and practices (Chapter 1) and discussions of exhibition theories and practices (Chapter 3) have shown, creativity and motivation is very much linked to how we react emotionally to a theme, exhibition or story. The concept of storytelling has developed as part of the postmodern museum communication. It may be seen as an opponent to the modern way of presenting collections through classification and chronologies - but also as a direct way of approaching visitor participation: *“If modernism questioned the survival of stories, postmodernism sees stories everywhere”* (Gabriel 2000: 17). Many exhibitions today are oriented towards the establishment of stories. This has become part of how museums interact with visitors: *“Stories and experience are linked in postmodern discourses like Siamese twins - not only do stories transform into experience, but experience turns into stories”* (Gabriel 2000: 18). Telling stories has always been part of interpretation and analysis at museums; theories on past societies and cultures are essential scenarios built from findings and research. However, visitors also make up their own stories when visiting museums, which is also part of the storytelling process. The more museums interact with visitors the more detailed and complex their stories become. This is the advantage of interaction that many museums try to build on. We use stories to illustrate points, to remember things, to engage audiences etc. However, the power of storytelling lies in the fact that it requires active listening and provides methods to emphasize meaning, understanding and feelings. Over the last decades the psychology behind storytelling has begun to show how stories influence the human mind. Stories, whether fiction or non-fiction, sometimes seem to influence our attitudes, fears, hopes and values much more than academic writing created to persuade through argument and evidence (Guber 2011; Schank and Berman 2002). Essentially, this comes down to the fact that the mind tends to be critical and sceptical when engaged in factual reading - whereas the intellectual guard tends to be lowered when the mind becomes emotionally absorbed. This makes storytelling a powerful tool in interaction activities,

fiction and organizational management.

Storytelling has developed in all aspects of organization and management practices during the last couple of decades; from being integral parts of developing creative communication strategies to identifying organizational potential and enhancing leadership motivation. These different uses of the concept provide an interesting potential for museums as communication reaches all levels of an organization:

“...storytelling has won a decisive foothold in the debate on how brands of the future will be shaped” (Fog et al. 2010: 17). Today, storytelling is used in as varied activities as organizational and management courses and workshops, as means of self-expression and communication for socially excluded community groups, as part of company branding and promotion, to increase historical and cultural awareness of for example heritage sites and as creative teaching and learning in education (Alexander 2011; Austin 2012; Boje 2008; Fog et al. 2010; Scottish Storytelling Centre: website).

This section will discuss some of the various aspects of storytelling and how these might benefit the postmodern and future museum concept. A discussion with Director of Scottish Storytelling Centre, Donald Smith, will seek to identify and debate how storytelling can enhance and strengthen museum communication and how the concept can play an essential part in shaping future communication (Appendix 2.2). In connection with Smith’s views this section will also include practical approaches and general theories on storytelling that seeks to explore how people can identify and strengthen their creative communication and how museums can create strong motivational environments for both staff and visitors.

Storytelling as a Communication Tool

The value of a good story is priceless to any organization. However, it can also help an organization build trust and a stronger connection between staff and users, as well as ensuring organizational aims and missions are shared internally among staff. A museum that uses storytelling internally has the opportunity to consider the authenticity of stories to be of great importance and enhance external communication with target audiences (Fog et al. 2010: 52-55). It is even possible to view storytelling as ‘the tool’ that can help museological discussions of change and development gain a clearer focus: *“... as the postmodernists have recognized, storytelling comes to the rescue of meaning in an*

epoch saturated by information in which meaning is constantly displayed and crowded by noise” (Gabriel 2000: 22). In a postmodern concept, storytelling becomes one of the most important tools for creating meaning - and can ensure emotional engagement and participation among museum visitors and staff (Rinta-Porkkunen and Ylitalo 2003; Ross 2004).

Literature on storytelling seems relatively recent; there are very few examples of storytelling described in connection with museums although many projects revolving around storytelling take place at museums all the time. Storytelling is not just guided tours or children events - it is something that takes place within the brain all the time simply because the brain is constructed to think in terms of narratives and relate to experiences and conversations by constructing stories (Dodd 2002; Gottschall 2012: 6-12). Stories activate the language processing parts in the brain much more than academic lectures because they connect with our experiences and emotions. Stories can thus encourage creativity on many levels. It is, for example, possible to be emotionally engaged by experiences that we have not actually had ourselves by listening to someone else tell about them. This is also why metaphors work well with most people; they shape images, emotions or stories in the brain. The brain simply becomes more active when we tell or listen to stories, which also explains why humans do not only dream at night but actually daydream many times during a day (Gottschall 2012: 11, 95-99). Storytelling is therefore one of the most powerful techniques we have as humans to communicate and motivate creativity.

It seems to be only in recent years that storytelling has emerged as a powerful communication tool within organizations and museums. According to Donald Smith this is due to the fact that we barely think about the presence of stories:

“I suppose the power of storytelling in the way that we think and interpret things is so pervasive that at times people feel very unconscious about it. And in a way you can understand that because it forms so much of the communication that sometimes people find it so hard to step back and say: “Okay, so what kind of narrative, what kind of storytelling are we doing?”. There are two things here; there’s narrative as a structure and a way of thinking and there’s storytelling as a way or ways of communicating” (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2).

Storytelling has emerged as more than just a narrative and has thus been given a whole

new meaning. By representing communication or the ways we communicate, storytelling become central parts of learning, education, social interaction and emotional engagement: *“If narratives are favoured objects of postmodern discourses, stories are favoured among narratives. Virtually any piece of text, any sign, any object that has drawn a gaze onto itself, tells a story; indeed, the failure to tell a story is a story in its own right”* (Gabriel 2000: 17). This statement from Chair in Organisation Studies at the University of Bath, Yiannis Gabriel, sums up how storytelling has always been part of people’s lives and therefore applies to any organisational structure, learning situation and social interaction. Yet, as Smith mentions, we are often unaware of the importance and influence of stories.

This is reflected in the way museums generally prioritise their communication development. The Scottish Storytelling Centre has developed a series of organisational development programmes for companies to choose from in order to enhance and motivate internal communication strategies (Scottish Storytelling Centre: website). Equally, museum staff often participates in courses and workshops as part of visitor engagement training (Kilgour and Martin 1997; Rowlands 2002). However, the way museums prioritise these development programmes can seem ambivalent: *“There is a funny thing about that which is quite interesting: The curators tend not to come to those courses. The education people come! Often guides as well”* (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2). Smith believes this has a strong connection to the hierarchy that exists in museums where curators are viewed as *‘the priesthood’* and visitor communication as a kind of *‘performance’* (Appendix 2.2). Essentially museums will have to acknowledge the skills and art of storytelling to overcome these prejudices:

“... there are skills around live interaction, thinking about the story and communicating the story that is very very interesting - they are about self presentation and communication and all the rest of it. They are universal but often go unexamined or un-reflected on because it’s thought of as being simple to tell a story. But it is not! There are so many complex things involved in it. It is very interesting that there are skills about editing, focusing, aiming communication that are hugely relevant to the design level of museum interpretation as well as the delivery” (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2).

The way this part of communication has generally been prioritised by museums seems

striking. When guides or front of house staff communicate stories to visitors it seems logical that this cannot be done in an interesting, relevant or engaging way if the curators have not been communicating knowledge, research and analyses in an interesting, relevant or engaging way in the first place. A curator's work is transformed at many stages and in many different ways; from research projects or collection analyses to exhibitions, guided tours, workshops, digital media, live interpretation and so on. It therefore seems strange that a curator should only be involved in the first process of this work: "*the exhibition is not finished when it opens - it's finished when it closes!*" (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2). The internal communication between curators, researchers, guides, storytellers, designers, technicians etc. is essential before museums even reach the stage of communicating with visitors.

Communication is essentially at the heart of storytelling which makes it relevant to so many aspects of practical museum communication. Many museums have so far considered it as part of visitor communication alone with a particular focus on live interpretation, living history and perhaps guided tours. This is not likely to change as long as exhibition creators, designers and curators do not take part in for example courses or workshops about communication and interpretation but instead leave that to front of house staff. Storytelling takes part at all levels of research, interpretation and design as well as internally between staff and professionals; in order to broaden and enhance this particular part of their communication practice, museums will have to acknowledge this. Although, resources may be limited at smaller museums this sometimes seem to have cleared the road for a closer community engagement and communication: "*The reason for that is very pragmatic; to survive. They need the community so this is a natural way to engage. It's not quite enough to focus on a narrow specific expertise subject - people are not going to come. People are not going to think that this museum is for us then. I'm not knocking smaller historic expertise topics but it has to work with some other stuff as well*" (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2). As mentioned in question 2 in the questionnaire analyses we get an example of this from The Orkney Museum; apart from engaging professionally in storytelling Exhibition Officer, Tom Muir, also describes the museum's cooperation with radio and TV stations as part of the museum's community outreach (appendix 1.3).

This creates an interesting link to communicating ‘the intangible’:

“The museum to a degree is about the tangible whereas the intangible is interesting. If you take the community of learning, the different groups and connections, they are partly already united with the museum in the tangible and cultural concept in a wider sense. I’m talking quite wide here... You can see in both local and national museums that this sort of dynamic of the intangible cultural heritage and how that links to the museum institution and the community is hugely powerful. In small local museums you often see a culture that has for centuries been shaped by this particular work or industry - and you can create some fantastic small projects that involve people if the artefacts connect with the intangible heritage. You begin to see these kinds of feedbacks where what you do in curating and objects meet the community of learning which feeds the intangible culture of learning” (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2).

Creating a learning and communicative community is essential to visitor communication. It also influences how research interpretation is carried out. Community projects and feedback will shape future exhibitions and activities at all types of museums - an aspect that makes the intangible communication very powerful: *“There’s another interesting layer about that: The design in curating and the narrative structure. You’ve got engagement through storytelling, a learning community that all influence these resources. People from the community of learning are becoming co-curators perhaps” (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2).* If museums embrace these aspects of their internal as well as external communication, the concept of storytelling becomes a very powerful tool in the practical communication process, as well as becoming an integrated part of the museum’s everyday life (Grincheva 2013). However, it requires that the museum works with its visitors: *“For a museum to truly engage its users, it must cease acting as a controlling gatekeeper to its collections and expertise. Rather, the museum must work with its users and communities to unlock the stories its collections hold, responding to the choices its users make” (Black 2012: 11).*

Storytelling in a Digital Age

Digital stories are currently created in nearly every digital device and they are experienced by almost everyone. They can be very personal or social, fiction or nonfiction, brief or detailed and involve immense creativity for both creators and users (Alexander 2011: 3-16; Green 2007; Grincheva 2013; Russo et al 2007). Digital

storytelling can be viewed as a digital extension of the traditional oral storytelling - yet, it focuses very much on providing opportunities for people to create and enhance their own stories and influence outcomes. Digital storytelling also makes it possible to combine still imagery, moving imagery, animation, audio, text, voiceover as well as interactive features. This enhances the experience for both creators and users and allows for greater interactivity. Digital storytelling is used as part of informal and formal learning as well as personal entertainment as digital tools and software makes it easy to both access and create stories.

Most museums have embraced digital media in their communication practices often without fully recognizing how to integrate it in their storytelling. However, digital storytelling is being used by many different museums and cultural institutions. In the UK one of the largest projects, *Culture Shock!*, took place in the North East of England (*Culture Shock!*: website). The project used museums and galleries to inspire people to create their own stories which have also been added to the relevant museum collections. *Culture Shock!* became one of the largest digital storytelling projects with almost six hundred participants creating their own digital stories which were added permanently to museum collections, broadcast online and at special events. The projects also involved workshops, exhibitions and a conference focusing on how digital heritage can be shared, developed and created (*Culture Shock!*: website).

An example of how to increase community engagement and engage in social media can be found in the project *The Grand Tour in York*. During the summer of 2008 *The Grand Tour in York* was created in the city of York (*The Grand Tour in York*: website). The project was carried out by The National Gallery and York Art Gallery and set out to celebrate some of the greatest works of art by “*setting the paintings free*” around the streets of the city (*The Grand Tour in York*: website). Tours were created around copies of forty-nine famous paintings which were hung on various town houses and buildings of the city. It was possible to download audio tours and tour maps created around specific themes: *The Grand Tour*, *The Heavy Hitters Tour*, *The Escape the City Tour*, *The Lovers Tour* and *The History of York Tour* (*The Grand Tour in York*: website). Each tour included some insider information about the paintings from curators and other experts.

The paintings became a very central element of the old town. Being in York

during that summer I often observed how people at first got a little confused to see a painting on the outside of a building but very quickly got engaged in conversations about the display or the idea of it. The blend of old and new buildings and seeing paintings in parks and streets may have attracted many to the art galleries but it also allowed both the museum and audiences to interact in a whole new way: All of a sudden, art was everywhere as an integral part of the town centre and its people. Because it took place in a new setting, the project inspired curiosity and attracted attention in a way it would not have done in a museum building. The outline also allowed for a certain amount of humour; for example seeing a copy of Massys's *A Grotesque Old Woman* on the outside wall next to a beauty shop often evoked a smile from passersby. The project also encouraged people to take their own photos of the artworks as they interact in street life of the city by setting up a Flickr group (The Grand Tour in York: website).

The main purpose of this project was not only to engage people in the city or increase the museum's marketing potential, but also to enable collections in a totally new way by making them accessible and approachable in new settings. The project provided the museum with possibilities of including social media outside the actual museum as people photographed and shared their interaction experiences online - at the same time tours and further information on artworks could be found and downloaded online. Essentially, the project proved that museums can engage visitors in their collections and provide participatory experiences without inviting visitors inside the actual museum.



Image 14: Copy of Poussin's 'The Triumph of Pan' on the Abbey Church Ruins in Yorkshire Museum Gardens (Photo: Jane Nielsen, July 2008).

Similar projects have taken place at museums, libraries and archives across Europe and America - the finished digital stories can have many different uses. Apart from building relations with communities and new visitor groups, digital storytelling projects can also add to museums' collections, learning and communication, advertise upcoming exhibitions and events, enhance museums' digital capacities and provide new possibilities for the inclusion of volunteers (Jones 1995; Lambert 2013; Wiszniewski 2012).

What is interesting in these examples is the social interaction and emotional engagement that they have encouraged. In order to make people engage in the projects and contribute their own stories they have to feel a strong personal connection and be able to socially engage with others: *"There's good storytelling behind digital media. You also have the social media, which also allows for participation. However, there's still a place for the live engagement. People still need to be people - still need to be social"* (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2). Although Smith believes that the range of digital resources available can enhance interaction and increase a museum experience, he also

believes that the use of digital media will make people appreciate and understand the need for live and social storytelling more: *“I think there is a lesson in that: Yes, we should have all the technology but people love to speak, they love to talk to somebody...”* (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2).

Projects like *The Grand Tour in York* do not only allow for social media interaction but also bring a physical part of the museum to the public - even if it is not original paintings that are presented. The use of social and digital media is a natural part of most people's lives yet, the emotional engagement still seems to be strongest when we engage socially: *“I think the desire to tell live along with increasing use of the digital go together - the reason for that is totally understandable and logical. We have a fantastic range of digital resources now, we can manipulate and present and so on, but actually that makes people realise more how special and important it is to be live.”* (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2). Almost all digital projects have a strong foundation in social engagement or social sharing of one's personal stories and this seems to be the best starting point for museums in both digital and social participation.

Museums can also find use for social media in their internal communication and storytelling. An example of a well-known problem was posted by Nina Simon on Museum 2.0's website (Simon 2013: website). In the blog she describes how one of the museum's front line staff members one day expressed her concern in feeling disconnected from the rest of the work at the museum and disconnected from staff working in the collections and in the offices. Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History decided to try something simple. They set up a private staff Facebook group. At first, Simon felt unsure about this as it would clearly only work if enough members joined and contributed. However, the experiment soon proved a great success: *“People use it to share surprises in the archives, inspiring meetings with artists, dead birds in the lobby, and free food in the fridge. People post silly photographs from the basement cleanup and cheer on each other's small successes”* (Simon 2013: website). The group seemed to encourage the sharing of little everyday things between staff that would normally never have been shared or discussed. When members of staff were away for conferences, etc. the Facebook group became a natural place to keep up with news (Simon 2013: website).

Many museums already have similar forums, for example weekly or monthly internal newsletters, where staff can share experiences. However, by using Facebook as an internal forum the museum has created a social place that 1) is already well-known to and used by most members of staff in a private capacity, 2) is quick and easy to use and where members can post photos, videos and comments on each other's posts, 3) creates a sense of connection 'behind the scenes' between staff members from different departments and 4) promotes creativity among staff as they get a sense of how their work interacts with the work of their colleagues.

This kind of internal social interaction naturally requires all staff members to be willing to use Facebook as a way of communicating. Discussions can be as formal or informal as agreed however, being an internal communication tool, informal communication seems to promote use as well as encouraging people to share their concerns and successes. At the same time it can work as an interesting administrative tool for management to spot potential problems, concerns, successes and new possibilities among staff (Velamoor 2010; Weil 1990; 1994).

Storytelling in the Future

Stories have always been part of human life and the way we tell stories has evolved with us. For museums that are trying to engage audiences, the collaborative nature of storytelling, exchanging tales and engaging in people's personal experiences is of particular interest. Storytelling is linked to so many other art forms (film, literature, visual art and so on) simply because it is part of communication. Smith believes that museums can benefit from this by engaging in all aspects of lives, histories and experiences:

"Museums, at the end of the day, represent cultural, social, educational and economical value that stand in their own right. From a sound valued base... In the cultural, political, economical world we are in, museums are centres of cultural understanding and people are communicating cultural understanding across boundaries, race and religion which is so important" (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2).

This requires that museums find their own aim to focus on: *"I think it is about setting a purpose! What is our purpose?"... "...it's part of telling the story about why we are here,*

about who we are and what we are trying to do as a museum and as museums together” (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2). This is an aspect that has more importance than many museums perhaps realise: *“Sometimes the most basic things are the most obvious and the ones we forget how to articulate. It takes me back to why stories are so pervasive without people realise how important they are. These values are so critical and essential but we have to keep articulating them”* (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2). Setting a purpose also asks the basic question: What is it we need to know? Museums represent all types of curiosity, imagination and knowledge that all deserve to be addressed: *“That is the most vital thing. Somehow bizarrely becoming a smaller world sometimes seem to be leading to more prejudice and competition and rivalry and stereotyping of other cultures - that is odd, isn’t it? So what is the role of museums in connection with that? To address it all!”* (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2)

This requires that the museum creates environments where social interaction can take place and develop. Interacting with exhibitions and objects is one aspect of creating social involvement - another is making visitors share experiences and stories:

“That goes back to the community of learning. That can only enrich everybody’s sense of the importance of the setting, the value of the collection, the value of this place. That goes back again to museum layers in design: You can look at any museum and say: “Okay, so where do people gather in this place? What’s the sociability? Where are people going to talk?” (Donald Smith; Appendix 2.2).

These questions are not just addressing the physical layout of museums but also how visitors choose to participate with spaces of learning and communication. These perspectives will be some of the most important for museums to consider in the future as their physical exhibition spaces often become online or community spaces.

There is a lot museums can learn from storytelling to improve and enhance internal and external communication. It requires that the concept of storytelling is implemented as an essential part of museums’ internal and external communication strategies. Implementing this concept in a communication strategy or vision could secure a broader tolerance (and less hierarchical structure) of internal staff communication and at the same time strengthen the museum’s visitor outreach. The concept is perhaps best integrated as part of visitor communication and we see many examples of this at museums. The Scottish Storytelling Centre has developed the so-

called ‘story boxes’ as part of their education programme - an idea also adopted by many museums in various forms (Scottish Storytelling Centre: website). The Old Town Museum in Denmark has for years conducted reminiscence workshops for elderly people suffering from dementia (The Old Town: website). These courses provide the elderly with an opportunity to work with and handle tools, objects, clothes, etc. from their youth in order to recreate forgotten memory structures (Black 2011). There are many examples where museums try to broaden or transform their current outreach approaches. However, they seldom involve internal museum communication, just as these new communication attempts are rarely articulated in official strategies or aims. The future of storytelling at museums will be about setting a purpose, finding a relevant focus, articulating it and communicating it. Many museums have been neglecting this. The importance of articulating and defining purposes and aims for both staff and visitor communication requires constant flexibility, renewal and development in articulation as well as practice.

Summary of Chapter 4

Many of the theories described throughout this thesis have not been implemented directly in museum studies or practice before. However, as part of the ongoing museological discussion I have found it interesting to seek these new approaches as part of expanding the possibilities for museums as well as trying to determine future directions. Although most of the discussions cannot be described in detail here they provide an overview of how museum studies and practice have developed and how museums see future challenges and opportunities. It is not possible to consider every aspect, theoretical or practical, when discussing museums’ implementation of new practices or new theoretical perspectives. This is quite natural, however, museums are clearly developing towards structures that require flexibility, changeability, creativity and more than anything transformation.

Implementing existing theories in museum research and practice should be part of museum development. Throughout this thesis elements from learning theories, sociology, philosophy, psychology and others have been described and discussed in connection with past, present and future possibilities. There is no doubt that the future will be more interdisciplinary; both research and practice have probably never been

more interdisciplinary than today. This can be viewed in the implementation of new approaches such as technological advances, exhibition writings and communication, new work methods such as project work, flexible exhibition features, increasing visitor tolerance for cultures and different life structures and in theoretical research, studies and education of new museum, heritage and communication students.

We see direct attempts to implement changeability and flexibility in exhibition design at both Riverside and Kelvingrove Museum (Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum: website; Riverside Museum: website). This is clearly a new way of considering exhibition layout and visitor interaction. Kelvingrove Museum has experienced some negative feedback on their approach (Morgan 2013; Sharp 2012: 26) mainly because changes were not big enough for visitors to spot or did not make a significant enough change to the overall display layout. Perhaps this approach also requires that the museum pay extra attention to both visitors and exhibition layout for every changing feature. However, this is obviously feedback that the museum can learn from and also shows that visitors have been interested in the concept and willing to return to the museum to gain new perspectives on known themes. Museums are slowly trying their own approach on these new requirements - although some elements might not work at first, museums are willing to experiment.

All this naturally begs the question, where are museums going from here then? The postmodern museum is clearly a participatory and engaging museum (Black 2005; 2012; Simon 2010). However, it is certainly also a museum of transformation and flexibility. Many museums seek to be collaborative and enter into new partnerships (question 3 in the questionnaire) and they are encouraged to do so as described in the new *National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries (Going Further - The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries: website-b)*. However, at the same time museums also have to be places of social interaction, meaning-making and relevance, places of experimentation and curiosity, and listening places. All these elements encompass communication and flexibility. With a strong and robust communication definition museums would undoubtedly stand stronger, not just in the implementation of new exhibition approaches or communication features, but also to face and develop future possibilities. To many museums communication is still limited to PR or media handling, but to ensure elements such as learning, exhibition design and

creation, visitor interaction as well as internal museum communication, a thorough communication strategy is essential.

This makes the concept of storytelling highly significant, not only as part of a profound and varied visitor communication, but as part of implementing aims, definitions and potential as essential aspects with staff and in partnerships. In a postmodern communication structure - with all the different possibilities and challenges it proposes - storytelling can act as a valuable meaning-making tool. Most museums could benefit immensely from articulating their aims and purposes in communication definitions. However, the concept of storytelling also offers the possibility of increased motivation and creative communication among staff, development of new digital projects which emotionally engage users at a personal and social level and possibilities of articulating and developing future purposes, activities and communication structures.

Transformations in museums have been underway for some time, although museums will always be different and approach new features in their own way. So far only one thing seems certain no matter which perspective one takes in the museological debate: museums cannot only be places of past and present, they also lead to the future: *“The past keeps coming at you in new waves, pretending to be the future!”* (Smith 2008: website). To make meaning of ‘new waves’ from the past, museums will have to focus on the future as well and look at what it has to offer.

Chapter 5:

Museum Communication and the Future

Section 1: Future Studies

Introduction: The Future

There can be no doubt that museums are looking to the future. Most museums want to be able to shape and to some degree predict what will come to them. For a few years we have seen the first attempts to include future possibilities in museum exhibitions, literature and research. In exhibition, communication, learning and interpretation practices museums have a wide range of disciplines to rely upon; history, sociology, philosophy, epistemology, psychology, etc. All of these disciplines can, in their own way, support museums. However, when looking to the future there is one discipline that may prove particularly useful for museums: the studies of futurology or simply future studies. Apart from the actual academic discipline of future studies this also means that museums must look at relevance and how to provide relevant information, learning and experience.

The first section of this chapter will take a brief look at how relevance can be created in museums and present a few examples. The main focus of this section is the introduction of future studies as a relevant discipline for museums to learn and seek inspiration from. The section focuses particularly on Richard Slaughter's theory of *The Transformative Cycle* and how this can prepare museums for future transformations (Slaughter 2004). Although there are many future studies theories that could form relevant and interesting perspectives to museology, I have chosen Slaughter's theory to define connections to Luhmann's and Foucault's theories as well as identify practical approaches to future museum communication. Section 2 takes up a significant case study from Historic Royal Palaces where the work of futurologists has provided important input for how the museum has conducted various tasks. Historic Royal Palaces forms an interesting case study not just because of a direct use of futurological work but also because it consists of historic houses and castles as well as exhibitions. Section 3 will look at the final three questions of the questionnaire and analyse how museums themselves view possibilities and challenges of the future.

Creating Relevance

In connection with meaning-making and interaction it is often mentioned that museums must seek to create relevance too. If not relevant the experiences of communication, interaction and learning seem to fail (Schorch 2013). Naturally relevance is sought to be created within various exhibition, learning or communication approaches - yet it might be helpful at this point to explore what exactly relevance can encompass in connection with museological discussions. As an alternative approach to this, the concept of relevance theory will be briefly introduced.

Relevance Theory

Relevance theory started as a cognitive approach, which sought to explain how methods of communication could take into account implicit inferences. It was put forward by cognitive scientist Dan Sperber and psychologist Deirdre Wilson in *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* in 1986 (Sperber and Wilson 1995). Relevance theory argues that audiences will search for meaning in any given communicative situation, and when having found meaning that suits their expectations of relevance, will stop processing (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 1-8; Wilson and Sperber 2004). The communicator has to take into account the context of the communication and the cognitive environment between communicator and audience - this includes considering an audiences' prior knowledge. This means that the communicator says just enough to communicate what is intended and the audience then fills in the details of what has not explicitly been communicated using their prior knowledge or experiences. When communicating the communicator naturally believes that what he/she says is worth listening to and therefore provides a cognitive effect required to find meaning (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 1-8).

Sperber and Wilson believe relevance to be subjective as it depends upon the state of knowledge of the listener when he/she encounters information. The same statement or utterance will therefore have different degrees of relevance to different individuals at different times. Relevance Theory defines an essential part of human inference in communication. It states that receiving communication is a process of sifting through the available inputs to find the information most relevant. It allows for the receiver to infer what is most important and for the communicator to have a degree

of control over the importance; this indicates that, for example, a museum does not only communicate information or knowledge but also information of the museum's wishes to inform visitors of their intention. Attention is not just on what is communicated but also on the intention (or wish) to communicate. This is carried within communication itself and seeks to make visitors' processing effort worthwhile. The effort of processing is weighed against the possible cognitive benefit.

Sperber and Wilson summarise this process in what they call The Cognitive Principle of Relevance: "*Human cognition tends to be geared towards the maximisation of relevance*" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260). They argue that another communicative principle of relevance is that every utterance carries a presumption of its own optimal relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260-266; Wilson and Sperber 2004). Listeners process a stimulus and transform this into the interpretation that grants the stimulus the maximum degree of relevance. The very production of an utterance raises an expectation in listeners that the utterance is relevant enough to be processed and that the utterance is the most relevant one for both communicator and receiver (Sperber and Wilson 1995; Wilson and Sperber 2004). This notion does not only make museum visits relevant for visitors but also poses the statement that visitors are willing to listen and interact (and expect it) and seek relevance and meaning of what they experience. Museums as communicators naturally believe that what they communicate is worth communicating. However, they also have to consider that they communicate their intentions of communicating. Museums have to be willing to display and discuss these (sometimes hidden) intentions in order to increase relevance progression. Two practical attempts of creating museological relevance will be described in detail here.

Samdok: Approaching Contemporary Relevance

Discussions of relevance within museums also pose the question of what is relevant in a museum - and how to make it relevant for visitors. Museums have the power to decide what should be remembered and preserved for the future. Communicating the story of objects and cultures also involves creating new knowledge by forming new communication perspectives and networks. The following example has been chosen for its uniqueness and sustainability; the initiative has existed through many years and has provided many museums with new ways of thinking about the future museum.

In 1977, cultural history museums in Sweden founded Samdok. Samdok was a voluntary association of museums and their network for contemporary studies and collecting. The aim of Samdok was to create qualitative research and studies into present times, and to deepen knowledge and understanding of cultures and people of both the past and present (Samdok: website). The purpose of Samdok has been to form a kind of ‘tool kit’ to enable the discussion and implementation of these issues at museums. The word Samdok is derived from *sam* meaning contemporary and *dok* meaning documentation. Documentation refers to the collection and interpretation of everything from visual, verbal and material sources (Steen 2004: 197).

The idea for Samdok was developed during the 1970s as a response to a review that showed how many museum collections in Sweden rarely represented contemporary objects or sources. Today Samdok has more than eighty members throughout the country and members co-operate in working groups known as ‘pools’. A museum chooses for itself which pool(s) it wishes to work with and implements and finances its own research and studies. Content, directions and developments are discussed and planned with colleagues in the pools and after each project new knowledge, collections or information is added to the Samdok collection of contemporary studies (Samdok: website; Steen 2004). This work is coordinated by the Samdok Secretariat (Samdok’s Tidning: website).

Samdok’s main work involves: “*collecting today for tomorrow*” (Steen 2004: 199). The pools (or work groups) at the heart of Samdok and are responsible for deciding what constitutes memory of societies and turning this into realistic projects. There are several pools within the Samdok association. Some represent fields of human activity, places or situations where people of today interact (for example one group focuses on *Sami Life* as an indigenous ethnic minority). The *Group for Cultural Encounters* was formed in 1993 and has the purpose of integrating cultural-encounter perspectives in all pools (Samdok: website; Steen 2004). The pools carry out studies and collections through the individual museums represented. Each pool assembles twice a year to discuss the projects, contemporary issues as well as theoretical, methodological and ethical issues. Researchers are frequently invited and study tours and field seminars are organised. It is also the responsibility of each pool to produce a programme of action - or a kind of work strategy - as a common guideline for the group.

At the end of 2011, the Samdok Secretariat closed, although it is presently believed that the pools and their work are to continue in a yet undetermined form and that networks will still be created as results of present pool cooperation (Ulfstrand 2011: website). The work carried out at the pools of Samdok over the years does not only demonstrate a need for contemporary collection but also a need for communicating the present at museums. Defining what may or may not be interesting in the future encourages a new form of interest in the present; including a focus on how we communicate objects, material and cultures of today. The work of Samdok can be viewed as an attempt to create contemporary relevance or of making well-known objects, sources and materials of today matter for future museological perspectives. The work is not only interesting because it was one of the first direct attempts at contemporary collection and research, but also because the focus within and outside museums has clearly shifted from being about meaning making (and relevance) of the past to actually creating it for the future. Due to financial pressure, the Samdok Secretariat decided to close at the end of 2011. Although we do not yet know under what circumstances the network groups are to continue, the concept has not only been inspiring for a number of museums in other countries, but can also be viewed as a significant step towards making intangible concepts of relevance and contemporary meaning-making more visible.

A National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries

Attempts to create relevant and purposeful museum structures also occur at political levels. In March 2012, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs in Scotland, Fiona Hyslop, unveiled the first National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries called *Going Further: The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries*. It was presented as a pioneering strategy to connect and strengthen the network of museums and galleries throughout the country. The strategy is meant to “... unite the sector in a vision to achieve a more sustainable future and to maximise the sector's reach, growth and potential” (*Going Further - The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries*: website-a). The introduction of the strategy will be coordinated by a new National Development Body who will support the museum sector

in meeting the strategy's aims and objectives. The National Development Body will be a strategic body created to assist the museum and gallery sector and have the main role in facilitating the delivery of the new strategy (Museums Galleries Scotland has been invited by the Scottish Government to perform the role). At the launch of the strategy, the Culture Secretary also announced that the Scottish Government will support the sector through grants of 3.3 million pounds over the next three years (Museums Galleries Scotland: website).

The strategy was introduced after discussions and dialogue with the museum and gallery sector and partner organizations. During the summer of 2012 a series of road shows were announced wherein museums could discuss the strategy further and contribute to the development of a Strategy Delivery Plan. The strategy poses six different aims and objectives: to maximise the potential, strengthen connections, empower a diverse workforce, forge a sustainable future, foster a culture of collaboration and finally develop a global perspective (*Going Further - The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries*: website-b: 17).

The development of a national strategy for the Scottish museums is indeed a very ambitious project; first of all because it has never been done before but more importantly because it is a direct attempt to connect a sector of very varied institutions. With more than three hundred and forty museums and galleries in Scotland a Development Body will be necessary not just to set a common agenda but also to attract new financial investments and create new partnerships throughout the sector.

It is also interesting to look at why the need for a national strategy comes at this particular time: "*This Strategy comes at a time of great change which brings with it the opportunity to revisit, rethink and refresh the museum offer within the wider landscape of social and cultural capital. It is an opportunity to move towards smarter working and to introduce an enterprising edge in the way challenges are approached*" (*Going Further - The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries*: website-b: 9).

The main factors in the creation of this strategy have been to secure an economic sustainability, introduce new features within museums, and to strengthen cooperation with local authorities and communities. These are factors in which museums have often struggled in the past, and have been exacerbated by the global financial crisis. However, it is also interesting to note the 'national' aim of the strategy. Besides aiming to bring

museums in Scotland closer together and aspiring to develop further partnerships between museums, this is also clearly an attempt to secure the sector as a whole for the nation. This is not unusual during financial hardship or indeed at a time when Scottish independence is heavily debated and even faces a referendum in 2014. However, it also touches on those aspects of museum practice that museums (probably throughout the world) are commonly struggling with. By constantly viewing each other as rivals, sustainable partnerships are hard to create and maintain, but by presenting a common 'national' strategy these types of initiatives can touch on many of the historical, cultural and social perspectives that museums throughout the country share. Many museums often refer to established policies or internal strategies when dealing with partnerships or cooperation (Question 3 in the questionnaire). Not many seem to be able to name a direct or sustainable partnership that has created new approaches or perspectives to the museum's own work. Furthermore, many museums are pointing towards staff or use of volunteers when discussing which resources they believe to be the most important in learning and communication management of their museum (Question 2 in the questionnaire). This does not only suggest that volunteers are becoming more necessary as financial resources decrease, but also that museums generally do not think of partnerships with other museums or fellow institutions as a resource in their communication - at least not a resource that seem natural to mention.

The unpleasant truth is that most museums cannot imagine how to "*Maximise the potential, strengthen connections, empower a diverse workforce, foster a culture of collaboration*" yet alone "*forge a sustainable future or develop a global perspective*" (*Going Further - The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries*: website-b: 17) without a direct set of tools to use on a daily basis. This does not mean forcing a new policy on existing museum staff (this rarely creates a sustainable partnership nor forge new potentials), but creating an individual approach for each museum to follow. This puts considerable pressure on museum management and leadership as it is their job to make the aims and objectives of a national strategy a reality. The biggest danger of forging a national strategy at the highest political level is often that although a shared strategy can create a set of useful guidelines for many museums to use in their daily practices, they often end up being nothing more than unobtainable visions of an ideal museum community. It will require strong cooperation with the management of

museums to put the vision into practice - something which the strategy has had to recognise:

“... the Strategy recognises that institutions vary in terms of their governance and funding models, their size and complexity, as well as their organisational priorities. This diversity means that elements of the National Strategy will be more relevant to some museums than others. The Strategy is designed to take account of these differences and will enable the whole sector to contribute to the vision whilst also meeting their own objectives” (Going Further - The National Strategy for Scotland's Museums and Galleries: website-b: 42).

Although there are naturally many issues to consider when forming a national strategy for a museum culture as varied as the Scottish, there are also many advantages to be gained by presenting a new strategy during a time when most sectors have felt financially, and perhaps politically, neglected for a while. During the drafting of the Scottish strategy, it was important that all parties felt that they could voice their opinions and be taken seriously by both the political leadership and their potential partners. This also provided good reasons for the government to support the sector by introducing grants of 3.3 million pounds during the following three years by showing which potential museums can hold when they stand together in a shared national strategy. No doubt, the grant scheme will encourage some museums to aspire to some of the strategy's aims and objectives. It also requires museums to consider their future aims, purposes and ultimately their strategies in details. To do this, the discipline of future studies can bring new perspectives to museums.

Future Studies

Future study is a relatively recent academic discipline involving systematic and explicit thinking about alternative futures (Bell 2009a: 6-7). The exact origin of future studies is unknown as possibilities and predictions have always been part of academic disciplines, research and learning. It is still debated whether the discipline is in fact art or science (Bell 2009a: 5-7). Future studies can also be seen as a trend developed as part of foresight awareness. From the middle of the 1990s, future studies was one of three disciplines that developed rapidly (with political developments and strategic planning being the other two). Foresight awareness thus occupies the space in which planning, futures studies, and policy development overlap. The aim is not to define policies,

dispose of existing planning processes or develop new decision making approaches; rather, it seeks to complement these features and increase their effectiveness. It has always been a well-known fact that if we look at where we are going we might get there (Bell 2009a; 2009b; Heiden et al 2002; Bola 2012; website).

It should be made clear that future studies is not about predicting the future nor about future facts. It is essentially about demystifying the future and making people think about it in order to assist the present. As the future cannot be a repeat of the past, future studies becomes relevant for both individuals and organizations. Future studies can create the proper tools for people or organizations to feel confident instead of overwhelmed about the future and can suggest alternative versions of the future. It involves analysis of possible futures and seeks to discover possibilities early on by acknowledging differences in history and culture and using the future to change the present fostering innovation. For organizations this can be an essential help to strategic planning. Future studies is therefore not about being educated for the future but about understanding the alternative possibilities and actively seeking to encompass them.

Future studies should be seen as an interdisciplinary field or a discipline that 'lies above' other academic fields or research. It is therefore open to alternative views, discourses and challenges (Bell 2009a; 2009b). Futurists often view the different angles of the field from various academic fields such as history, sociology, learning and so on. In the following sections I will try to outline some of the focus points of future studies and look at how specific future theories can apply to some of the mentioned learning and communication theories and exhibition practices.

Methods of Future Studies

Future study includes a wide array of systematic, participatory, strategic and interpretative analysis methods. Some apply to organizational analysis, some to social, personal or methodological approaches. Each centre or institution working with futurology has its own expertise and angle on the subject. The Centre for Future Studies in Kent is a strategic futures consultancy enabling organizations to anticipate and manage changes in their external environment. It primarily works with future scenarios involving:

- **Trend analyses** - reading directions and implications
- **Scenario planning** - researching the future
- **Visioning** - creating the future
- **Future strategy** - taking the long view
- **Horizon scanning** - seeing signposts to the future
- **Research** - understanding the past, present and future (Centre for Future Studies: website)

These kinds of methods involve working across a varied spectrum of political, economical, social and technological themes. They will have to focus on the individual requirements and challenges of each organization.

The Transformative Cycle

The Transformative Cycle (or simply T-cycle) in future studies looks at the processes of implementing changes by identifying the different phases of new ideas, concepts or innovations. It was developed by futurist Richard Slaughter in the early nineteen-eighties and further studied by him, Luke Naismith and Neil Houghton at The Australian Foresight Institute at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne (Slaughter 2004; Naismith 2004; Houghton 2004). Slaughter is notable for his studies in critical futures, which developed from the intersection of futures studies and social constructivism. One of Slaughter's key points is that social systems always resist change. This is the main reason why I have chosen to use Slaughter's theory in context with museum communication. As demonstrated by Foucault and Luhmann, a system will often first recognize changes when it comes across a disturbance; and disturbances can be seen in the four phases of the Transformative Cycle:

- *“Breakdowns of meaning*
- *Re-Conceptualisations*
- *Conflict and Negotiation*
- *Selective Legitimation”* (Slaughter 2004: 6).

What the T-cycle essentially seeks to define is the four phases that every innovative concept has to go through. Firstly, once a problem is identified it often causes a breakdown of meanings; “...it refers to understandings, concepts, values and agreements that once served to support social interaction but which now, for one reason or another, have become problematic” (Slaughter 2004: 6). Many breakdowns can be seen as problems and are therefore dysfunctional. However, they can also be seen as complex formations of ideas, understandings and meanings that could once be taken for granted but now cannot anymore. This definition is particularly close to Foucault’s definitions of epistemes, which defines the values, codes, languages, and meanings of a culture - the shift from one episteme (or concept of understanding) takes place when a ‘breakdown’ occurs. When a breakdown occurs there will be many ideas, proposals and re-conceptualisations for changes through a range of media; literary, theoretical, research, practical approaches, etc. They do not necessarily concern the future - yet they set out to offer future solutions to what may be considered problems or breakdowns.

New ideas will inevitably cause conflicts and require negotiations of some kind. Some conflicts will never reach the stage of negotiations; to negotiate requires that two opposite sides are willing to listen or view each other’s opinions as equals. The path from conflict to negotiation can thus be very long and complex and it will require persistence and support to reach the level of negotiation. Sometimes an idea has to be given up or sometimes changed or modified.

Selection is essential to the implementation of new ideas or concepts; there are generated far more ideas or proposals at any time than can be taken up. However, selection criteria cannot be guaranteed to be either fair or adequate in social systems. Therefore it might not always be the best ideas or proposals that are adopted (although the definition of ‘best’ is naturally a matter of perspective too). Therefore, the model does not propose that this particular process of change corresponds with improvements and sometimes it can result in regression. Selective legitimisation also depends greatly on who accepts new proposals and how they will be implemented. The process will often serve particular interests and validate meanings that already work for the majority (Slaughter 2004: 6-8; 2008).

From this rather basic form of the T-cycle, Slaughter presents a more elaborate cycle (Slaughter 2004: 9). In it he defines sub-processes that might influence the transformative cycle. Firstly, legitimated meanings will not usually return to the same breakdown process; time might have altered the original context and therefore a new meaning can be incorporated into other concepts. If a new idea or meaning is strong enough to receive wide support, new conditions or states are likely to follow, which is one of the many reasons why futures can be studied but not predicted. It is also worth distinguishing between failed suggestions that may not have been heard, and rejected suggestions that might have been heard and then ruled out. Slaughter also believes it is worth noticing that re-conceptualisations may generate counter-processes that can take the form of an inhibiting backlash. Also, conflicts may come and go and equally change focus: *“The first task of any new idea is for it to receive serious consideration! This applies both to those in positions of power and to ordinary people who have retained the capacity to co-create their lives”* (Slaughter 2004: 10).

Slaughter believes there are several uses for the T-cycle:

- “1: As a general-purpose workshop and teaching tool*
- 2: As a tool for the analysis of change within specific institutions*
- 3: As a tool for research and cultural criticism”* (Slaughter 2004: 11-12).

Through each type of context the research potential is considerable and creates a link to the described methods of both Luhmann and Foucault. The T-cycle becomes a useful tool for analyzing new ideas and concepts, but more interestingly, poses a disturbance or ‘breakdown’ that may lead to new meaning developments: *“The T-Cycle can therefore itself be understood as part of an approach to futures work that is centrally concerned with the recovery of meaning”* (Slaughter 2004: 12).

The process of implementing new ideas and meanings does not happen quickly. Ideas may therefore circle around in the T-cycle for a very long time going back and forth through different phases. However, it should be noted that almost all cultural innovations are a result of social innovations, which makes the processes even more complex as it involves social learning as well. Social learning often involves analysis of what does not work (and not just of what does work) as a way into a solution. It

acknowledges prior knowledge and experience thus making almost every step of the innovation process subjective. There is much strength to be gained by this and many conflicts to be negotiated.

Transformation must be seen as a particularly important element of future studies and related disciplines of strategic foresight and analyses: *“Transformation involves a holistic and deep change within individuals, organisations and societies. It covers both the inner change of people’s attitudes and their belief systems as well as how these changes are expressed in behaviours at the individual and collective level”* (Naismith 2004: 21). It can be argued that transformation is first and foremost about personal transformation, as it often requires a change in one’s inner perspectives before it is possible to change external factors. However, transformation can occur on a number of different levels from individuals to organizations and large global transformations. It can also occur at different times and will involve dynamic processes that continue before and after the transformation period (Slaughter 2001; 2008; Strategic Foresight: What, Why and How - video 1; video 2: website).

Museums and Transformation

It can be interesting to form an idea about how these ideas might apply to the current museological debates. Most discussions and practical attempts at change are of course still under transformation, however, as change is clearly visible at museums, many discussion themes can be placed in the cycle. In the following points my aim is to apply these processes in a museum context.

Breakdowns of meaning: Museums have for a long time struggled with new aspects of communication methods, new ways of exhibiting and interpreting collections. This comes at a time when visitor interaction and experience is more in focus than ever before. Requirements of social inclusion, community engagement and increasing visitor numbers collided with a period of financial hardship in most countries. This is causing museums to not only change their strategic approach to visitor communication and exhibition interaction but museums also have to find new ways to deal with changing requirements. Museums and the research environment have responded to this through a series of new concepts - some set up by an individual museum others through local,

regional or national debates where all aspects can be discussed.

Re-conceptualisations: As a result of these discussions new approaches are being suggested, debated and to some degree even carried out at specific museums. Experiments with new technology to promote exhibition and online experiences are attempted as well as partnerships with other organizations, community groups or related institutions.

Negotiations and conflicts: New approaches will lead to both failures and successes. Some museums have experienced new successful ways of including visitors, presenting collections and communicating their main fields of expertise. Others may have experienced less interaction and may even feel they are compromising their collections by focusing on exhibitions, interaction and communication. From these conflicts and negotiations come a number of different strategies and approaches; some created for the individual museum and some as part of a broader museum discussion. They all seek to implement new power processes of meaning-making and relevance.

Selective legitimization: This all lead to a subjective selective legitimization of processes that may or may not work for the individual museum. Discussions and debates may flourish in a broader sense between professionals and researchers. However; suggestions, ideas and approaches tend to be as varied as museums. Museological debates may, however, lead to new discourses of understanding and may create new states of forming communication.

Section 2: Case Study

Identifying Future Tendencies

Although many museums have already started to consider future perspectives in their communication and learning approaches, not many directly consult futurologists in their work. There is of course a financial cost to this and therefore it is primarily the larger museums that use this strategy. However, there can be many advantages. First of all, future companies will be able to spot general tendencies in society like economic changes, demographic or geographic changes to rural or urban movement, sociological transformations in communities or psychological behaviours of how people may influence each other. Some museums also cooperate with future companies on very specific tasks or projects where future behaviours, challenges and changes are essential.

The following example looks at how Historic Royal Palaces has utilised futurologists in their work and looks at some of the advantages and disadvantages of such cooperation. The Head of Financial Planning and Analysis at Historic Royal Palaces, Caroline Rand, explains how three of the five locations of Historic Royal Palaces have used the services of Trajectory Partnership to support the annual operating plan and strategic plan processes. Non-Executive Director of Trajectory Partnership, Chris Farmelo, tells about Trajectory's work with Historic Royal Palaces and how the work of foresight and prediction strategies can assist museums in planning their future communication. In the following discussion the two of them were asked the same set of questions about their cooperation and their work (Email correspondence with Caroline Rand and Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3; Trajectory Partnership: website; Historic Royal Palaces: website).

Case study: Historic Royal Palaces and Trajectory Partnership

Historic Royal Palaces became an independent charity in 1998 and looks after the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, the Banqueting House, Kensington Palace and Kew Palace. All of the palaces ceased being used regularly for royal court purposes in the eighteenth century and in 1851 the Government became responsible for their

management. The palaces that Historic Royal Palaces are responsible for today are all owned by the Queen, which means that she holds the palaces in trust for the next monarch and cannot sell or otherwise dispose of any interest in them. The palaces were first opened to the public in the nineteenth century and most of their contents are part of the Royal Collection (Historic Royal Palaces: website).

Historic Royal Palaces have been using the services of Trajectory Partnership once a year for the past eight to ten years. Their work applies to three of the palaces: Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace and Kensington Palace: *“Trajectory helps us once a year to build visitor projections (numbers and income). They cover five year (remaining of current year (circa one quarter), next year’s budget and another 3 years. This is to support our annual operating plan and strategic plan process”* (Caroline Rand; Appendix 2.3). This work requires a very thorough knowledge of the business behaviour of Historic Royal Palaces: *“Their modelling is based on a statistical analysis of the historical behaviour of HRP business. Their model takes into the following factors to come up with projections:*

- *Global economic performance*
- *Exchange rates*
- *Admission prices*
- *Expenditure by foreign visitors*
- *UK economic performance, especially real income growth, inflation, leisure spend*
- *Other factors (Sept 11, marketing activity, etc.)*

All factors are weighted and the weighting of the different factors is reviewed every year” (Caroline Rand; Appendix 2.3). These analyses require great knowledge of certain features of the work: *“We rely quite heavily, but not entirely, on econometric modelling techniques”* (Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3). However, Trajectory Partnership does not cover the internal activities of Historic Royal Palaces; for example special exhibitions and public programming as these require separate calculations and analyses for each location.

These general projections can support the museum in a number of ways. Firstly, they provide:

“An independent unbiased view with a more robust modelling tool to substantiate a very important part of our planning process” - secondly; *“A much*

better understanding and knowledge of the external conditions which we don't necessarily have the skills and bandwidth to explore in the way they do (Caroline Rand; Appendix 2.3). Chris Farmelo supports this view: *"It provides them with a better understanding of both the key drivers causing visitor numbers to go up and down over time and a structured framework to produce numerical forecasts as an input into their budgeting processes"* (Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3).

It is important to consider other factors alongside the economical features of forecasting techniques: *"Econometric modelling does have a number of shortcomings and it is important that the output from the forecasting models are used alongside other intelligence about the likely development of the particular visitor attraction we are working with. The outputs should not be used in isolation of other intelligence"* (Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3). It seems obvious that there will always be factors that forecasting models cannot predict as Caroline Rand explains: *"They cannot predict the weather which has a material impact on some of our palaces and the one-off events (bombing, pandemic, etc.) which can happen and have a devastating bearing on visitors and overall performance"* (Caroline Rand; Appendix 2.3). This is one of the reasons why the five-year-plan has to be updated once a year and data renewed.

It is not surprising that museums have to get used to working with these kinds of forecasting approaches in their daily economy and progress plans. Chris Farmelo focuses on the shortcomings of economic models by reminding us how important it is to view these models alongside other intelligences and developments of a visitor attraction, whilst Caroline Rand focuses on the unpredictable factors that can have immense impact on visitor numbers and development. As mentioned, future studies are not meant to predict the future, but to assist people and organisations in preparing for it. There will always be factors that cannot be predicted or calculated into progress or development plans. However, museums can learn how to be prepared for possibilities and challenges in making these plans. This might also be why budgets, economic plans and visitor numbers are the easiest places to start; here mathematical calculations are used to set up possible scenarios. Development plans concerning visitor interaction, participation, learning and communication can seem more complex to create as these often includes factors such as sociological, social, psychological, epistemological and even emotional movements. However, this does not mean that museums cannot and do not plan for the future by looking at these aspects.

The role of curators is undergoing significant transformations. Curators and educators therefore have to pay attention to trends and developments within their area of expertise. This can be difficult, especially in regards to new digital features. Technology evolves so fast that if a museum decided to implement existing technology in, for example, three years' time then that technology could already be redundant by the time a new exhibition opens. These issues require museums to be aware of new trends and also be aware of their use and possibilities. Implementation of new digital features can easily lead to different uses or developments of existing technology - museums need to be aware of this in planning processes as they need to know how their visitors communicate and what they communicate about.

What museums sometimes do not seem to notice in this work is just how much influence they can have on shaping the future by preparing for it. Of course it is not possible to affect the economic cycle simply by calculating certain numbers into your future plans. However, museums can adapt their plans to manage changes and museums have a huge advantage in spotting trends and tendencies through their communication; whether it happens in exhibitions, at events or through social media. This does not necessarily involve being at the forefront of everything that may or may not happen, but rather getting involved in conversations with visitors, researchers, other museums and with communities. It can offer museums the possibility to shape aspects of future learning, interaction and communication before they happen and to prepare for certain questions even before visitors begin to ask them. As an example, a quick look at many museums' Twitter accounts shows how this media not only puts museums in direct contact with visitors but also how they communicate with other museum institutions.

Caroline Rand has no doubt that the museum will keep using these kind of forecasting perspectives in the future and the trend seems to be spreading amongst museums, which Farmelo has noticed as well: *"Yes, there is an increasing amount of interest in 'futures' issues amongst museums and we are doing an increasing amount of work in the area. This ranges from the more quantitative and technical forecasting to more qualitative 'trends' analysis"* (Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3). As an example of this, the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA) is planning to use the services of Trajectory to offer a wider visitor projection service to other attractions (Caroline Rand; Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3; ALVA: website). Although it is still in

the early stages this partnership could make forecasting (at least in financial planning) a more common resource for a number of museums: “... *we thought that it would be a good idea to suggest a more general forecasting service to all large visitor attractions, specifically forecasting visitor numbers to their specific attractions*” (Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3). It will be interesting to see how museums will apply to this service and how it may influence other planning and development processes. Some larger museums already apply these kinds of forecasting services as part of their planning processes. It is undoubtedly something that will spread as numbers of forecasting companies grow and as future possibilities are considered part of museums’ strategies and policies.

Apart from showing how forecasting models can be applied to museums, the example from Historic Royal Palaces also shows how museums think about these partnerships. First of all, not many museums are used to reviewing plans every year to incorporate new updates or data. This creates an opportunity to manage changes and adapt to new possibilities. Secondly, it is interesting that Chris Farmelo focuses on the use of forecasting in connection with other intelligences, whereas Caroline Rand focuses on what forecasting cannot ‘predict’ in her reply to question 3 (Caroline Rand; Chris Farmelo; Appendix 2.3). This is an interesting way of replying to this question for both parts, which partly tells how interested forecasting companies are in engaging in other disciplines and practices at museums to provide broader (and perhaps more accurate) models and also how futurologists are viewed as ‘predictors’ by museum professionals, and perhaps less as ‘sounding boards’ for future development.

Using Foresight

These experiences naturally lead to the question, how exactly can museums implement foresight as part of their daily work? According to foresight research not many organisations are very good at this (Slaughter 2006: website). Too often, futurologists are used to carry out a few trend analyses or scenarios and maybe a few ideas are introduced to the management, but the futurist’s work is rarely implemented on a larger scale. To some degree this seems to be the case at Historic Royal Palaces as well, although there is clearly potential and a desire to expand the use of foresight analysis. A new awareness of futures began to emerge at the beginning of the new millennium - particularly after 11 September 2001 where new ways of preparation and prediction

began to develop. Slaughter identified ten reasons why many organisations seem to get the future wrong and in doing so also identified areas where they could develop their expertise and benefit from foresight (Slaughter 2006: website):

- 1: Short term thinking
- 2: Bounded rationality
- 3: Unexamined presuppositions
- 4: Overlooking language, culture and traditions
- 5: Overlooking paradigms
- 6: The 'fog' of conventional thinking
- 7: Mainstream economics
- 8: Limited use of futures methods
- 9: Tokenistic responses and lack of capacity
- 10: Foresight strategy requires futures literacy (Slaughter 2006: website).

As Slaughter elaborates on these points he also highlights that many organisations are a bit too familiar with repressing future development and change (Slaughter 2006: website). Besides missing potential development opportunities they also fail to understand the dangers ahead and as a result risk becomes uninsurable. These points also bring awareness to how museums can begin to focus their creativity towards future developments. Museums that already use foresight companies as part of their economic planning have every opportunity to widen this cooperation to include curatorial work, research and visitor communication. The ten points make it possible to turn reluctance in to a positive future thinking that can be implemented as part of both internal and external expertise.

Section 3: Questionnaire Analysis

Discourse Analysis: The Future

“Society is changing much faster than we are. We must accept the need for rapid change in museum ethos and practice, even in times of financial hardship, in order to respond to twenty-first century demands - a big challenge for a profession that is notoriously resistant to change. For the necessary change to happen, we must all be futurists now” (Black 2012: 8).

The following three following questions were the last on the questionnaire. They focus on future exhibition and learning practices and ask how museums view future challenges and possibilities. Not many museums have been looking towards the future, and as Black mentions; this is a great challenge. There can be many things to learn from future studies - sometimes it can be both necessary and beneficial to think as a futurist.

QUESTION 7:

How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

Five of the museums who answered this question answered thusly:

Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh - Susan Gardner, Curator: *“I'm sure that lots of museums will experiment with new technology using mobile phones and other portable devices, however, these change so quickly it may be difficult to commit to one method/device. People are increasingly comfortable with film, a/v presentations and in-person interpretation but I think there will always be a role for printed communication too”.*

Leicester Museums and Galleries - Liz Wilson Collections, Interpretation and Learning Manager: *“Yes - our curatorial voice will become more diverse as we embrace interculturalism”.*

MOMA WALES - Ruth Lambert, Exhibitions Organiser: *“There is no substitute for personal interaction. We hope that will continue”.*

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art and Provand's Lordship - Clare

Gray, Learning and Access Curator: *“I think technology will continue to influence exhibition communication and learning. While St Mungo is not a venue that uses a great deal of technology, many more, such as Riverside, are starting to. I think accessibility issues will continue to influence exhibitions”.*

National Museum of Piping - James Beaton, Project Manager: *“More use of digital technology, also for us, audio posts will be important”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Use of technology:** *“I think technology will continue to influence exhibition communication and learning”, “I’m sure that lots of museums will experiment with new technology using mobile phones and other portable devices, however, these change so quickly it may be difficult to commit to one method/device”, “More use of digital technology, also for us, audio posts will be important”.*
- **Accessibility and interaction:** *“There is no substitute for personal interaction”, “I think accessibility issues will continue to influence exhibitions”, “our curatorial voice will become more diverse as we embrace interculturalism”.*

Discussion of answers: Most museums point to new technological features when being asked about future trends in exhibitions. Most of them are already using technology in exhibitions; however, there is also a slight reluctance towards this trend. Some museums believe that technology is difficult because both hardware and software change so quickly that it can be difficult to keep up with the newest features. There is also concern about financial resources as this is often an expensive investment. This might be the reason why some museums mention personal or live interaction as the most important future tendency. However, personal interaction is rarely mentioned in connection with storytelling or visitor communication but instead as a kind of excuse for not using the newest technology. Many museums obviously feel like they should provide some kind of technology in their exhibition practice and if they do not they feel that they have to explain why.

There may of course also be a deeper wish of engaging in personal visitor connections behind these thoughts. Visitors are used to communicating through

technology, but this may well increase the desire to ‘tell live’ and to view exhibitions and activities in a social and personal context as well (Donald Smith; appendix 2.2). As technology becomes a more common way of communicating, creating accessibility is likely to encompass the creation of social space as well in future exhibitions. People have always visited museums for social as well as personal experiences - this does not have to oppose the use of technology, as many technological communication methods are both social and personal.

Museums have always used their objects and collections as a source for human interaction; live interpretation and storytelling are very popular because of this - the use of social media or technological features in exhibitions does not oppose this interaction although many museums may regard it in this way. Hardware in exhibitions tends to be outdated very quickly. However, communication through social media, interaction with visitors’ own use of for example mobile technology in exhibitions and online interaction with collections provide visitors with even more ways of interacting with objects and collections.

In August 2013, the Head of Policy and Communications, Maurice Davies posted some interesting perspectives on his Museums Association blog (Davies 2013: website) as a reply to Senior Producer for CNN Travel, James Durston’s article “Why I hate museums” (Durston 2013: website). Davies also included some comments from readers of the article in his analyses. Durston’s provocative piece discusses several reasons why many visitors find museums boring: *“It feels to me like someone created a rule back in the first days of museums - ‘stick it in a case and let people look at it’ - and that no one has had the courage or the imagination to take things on a step since”* (Durston 2013: website). Davies agrees on this: *“... museums are still dominated by an essentially 19th century technology - putting things in glass cases or on the wall with little labels. Of course there are other approaches but this is the main technique used by most”* (Davies 2013: website). Durston finds it difficult to locate what museums want: *“Where’s the relevance? Why, in places designed to celebrate life and all its variety, is there such a lack of vitality?”* (Durston 2013: website). In Davies’s blog this leads to a discussion of what is important for museums; servicing visitors or preserving objects. Davies argues that museums should be places to learn and have fun and concludes that museums should generally be better at listening to visitors’ suggestions: *“If*

preservation trumps fun then museums are really in trouble” (Davies 2013: website).

The debate on collections and visitors will be discussed in detail in Question 9, however, Davies’ blog does not only present some interesting issues it also comes at a time when the purposes and aims of museums are more scrutinised than ever. The core of this discussion focuses on visitors’ interests and not on many of the features museums try to encompass like the use of new technology or live interpretation etc. What is important to visitors is what museums want to tell and how they tell it. Naturally, some visitors prefer live or personal interpretation, others new technology and some to read labels, etc. Museums do not necessarily have to encompass it all as long as they tell their stories through clear defined purposes and communication. Questions about what museums want to tell and how could form useful starting points when defining aims and purposes.

QUESTION 8:

What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

Five of the museums who answered this question answered thusly:

Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Swansea University - Carolyn Graves-Brown, Curator: *“Lack of space and resources”.*

Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh - Susan Gardner, Curator: *“The challenges are keeping up with the expectations of an increasingly sophisticated audience in terms of technology and making sure that if we embrace these means of communication they are meaningful and not just gimmicks”.*

The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester - Henry McGhie, Head of Collections and Curator of Zoology: *“like the Red Queen, we have to keep running in order to stay still. We strive for excellence, so turn challenge to opportunity”.*

MOMA WALES - Ruth Lambert, Exhibitions Organiser: *“Finance and strong leadership”.*

Museum of Science and Industry - Sarah Baines, Collections Centre Facilitator: *“Ongoing challenge: balancing needs of family visitors with needs of specialist visitors”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Lack of resources:** *“Finance and strong leadership”, “Lack of space and recourses”.*
- **Defining expectations:** *“We strive for excellence, so turn challenge to opportunity”, “The challenges are keeping up with the expectations of an increasingly sophisticated audience in terms of technology and making sure that if we embrace these means of communication they are meaningful”, “balancing needs of family visitors with needs of specialist visitors”.*

Discussion of answers: Defining challenges is always difficult yet it gives museums an opportunity to prepare for future tendencies and possible problems. In times of financial difficulty and employment cuts it is not strange that many point to a lack of resources as a main challenge. However, it poses an interesting question: Can creativity and creative development exist without funding? To some degree, this is a question that is ultimately shaped by how museums prioritise: *“It is no surprise, if profoundly depressing, that the chief response by museums to public funding cuts has been to decimate the teams who engage directly with the public”* (Black 2012: 4). This poses the question of museums’ aims and purposes yet again; although museums have always conflict over purpose it would seem more important than ever to define and articulate an individual purpose in times of financial cuts. This might provide the museum with an opportunity to focus on specific specialities and seek funding for individual projects or activities. Project funding has a limited lifespan, however, if prioritised and managed correctly a museum can build a totally new purpose and function around a project that may well reach out to new visitor groups.

Another challenge seems to concern definitions of expectations; many of these challenges could easily become opportunities through clearer definitions. Most museums do not seem to know where to focus their expectations of either themselves or their audiences in their answers. Some mention technology as a main expectation, others that balancing activities and exhibitions to suit both families and specialists is the main challenge, and others that their museum simply strive for excellence. Formulations

are generally vague thus making these definitions of expectations, purposes and focus a challenge.

QUESTION 9:

What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

Five of the museums who answered this question answered thusly:

MOMA WALES - Ruth Lambert, Exhibitions Organiser: *“Being able to continue our present unique contribution to the arts. We would like to be able to bring in more exhibitions from outside Wales”.*

National Museums Scotland – C. Sexton, Exhibition Co-ordinator: *“As I noted in point 2. I do not think that learning and communication will make us unique. It will be the objects which do this”.*

The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester - Henry McGhie, Head of Collections and Curator of Zoology: *“-relationship between audiences and academic discourses, with use of collections”.*

Museum of Science and Industry - Sarah Baines, Collections Centre Facilitator: *“More will be made of the museum location and site, making the museum more coherent in its narrative message and impact”.*

Glencoe and North Lorn Folk Museum - Claire Robinson, Curator: *“We would like to capitalise on the historic setting and traditional appearance of the museum building (it's unique selling product) by developing an education programme that makes use of these assets to inspire and educate our visitors. We are piloting a costumed interpretation event called 'Meet the Jacobites' this month (funded by Museums Galleries Scotland) and storytelling event in August (funded by the Scottish Book Trust). If these events are a success, we will look to expand our activities in this area in the future”.*

Key words and terms in the answers:

- **Focus on objects and collections:** *“I do not think that learning and communication will make us unique. It will be the objects which do this”, “use of collections”.*
- **Focus on site and exhibitions:** *“We would like to be able to bring in more exhibitions from outside Wales”, “More will be made of the museum location and site, making the museum more coherent in its narrative message and impact”, “relationship between audiences and academic discourses”, “capitalise on the historic setting and traditional appearance of the museum building (it's unique selling product) by developing an education programme that makes use of these assets to inspire and educate our visitors”.*

Discussion of answers: Although answers to this kind of question are very individual, many museums point to some of the same things; either focus seems to be on collections and objects or on direct visitor activities and exhibitions. This is not surprising as these are the two major concerns for museums, which may also be the reason why many discussions of future development tends to be debated on which area of work is prioritised the most: collections or exhibitions. It has long been discussed if prioritizing communication and interaction at museums might compromise collection management and conservation. Sometimes it appears that discussing communication and learning is automatically an attempt to deemphasise collections or objects; focus is rarely on how interlinked the disciplines really are: *“To write interesting and engaging texts, to interpret, explain and engage, and to understand the world around us, we need to understand collections”* (Heal 2012b: 4). Heal also stresses that there are many other things museums need to understand: *“We need to understand the public: who they are, why they come, and why they don’t. We need to know about their interests and their learning styles, what stories they have and the connections that they make to collections. And there shouldn’t be a conflict between that and collections knowledge”* (Heal 2012b: 4). It can sometimes seem strange that the ‘collections versus visitors’ debate has turned into the argument it has. However, it is also an expression of how enthusiastic most professionals are about their own expertise. Instead of ‘protecting’ one’s own area of expertise so desperately it could be interesting to turn this enthusiasm

into a more beneficial use for the museum. Most curators are already broadening their expertise to communication and front-of-house work: *“In the face of cuts and cost savings, one-time specialists are increasingly expected to be multi-tasking generalists”* (Holt 2013: 30). Although, the work of a curator differs at smaller local museums and bigger national museums most curatorial work has a strong focus on interaction and communication. This can cause confusion within the area itself. Director of Museums and Renaissance at Arts Council England, Hedley Swain describes how important it is for everyone at a museum to understand the basic tenets of why they exist: *“But some people continue to cling on to a conservative view of what they think curatorship should be”... “perhaps we need a new term to describe a new breed of museum professionals”* (Holt 2013: 30). Chief executive of the Collections Trust, Nick Poole believes there has been a rejection of the idea of curatorship in an attempt to become more socially engaged - this may have resulted in an identity crisis: *“... one of the things that makes us relevant is knowledge and expertise. The best way to be socially just is to know what we’re talking about”* (Holt 2013: 30). Whether due to financial cuts or education of new generations of curators and communicators, there is no doubt that the curatorial role is under transformation. As the role of curators begins to involve everything from research into collections, visitor and community involvement to marketing responsibilities this transformation will undoubtedly influence museums’ formulation of purposes, aims, relevance and strategies in the future. Poole adds: *“We really need to articulate a more confident and celebratory model of what a balanced museum that’s both socially engaged and knowledgeable looks like”* (Holt 2013: 30). If such a model is to do all areas of museum practice justice, it will have to acknowledge these transformations and provide room for them to take place as natural developments of museum research and communication (Grewcock 2013; Heinrich and Pollak 1996; Knell et al 2007; MuseumsEtc. 2013).

It is also interesting to note that two of the fifteen museums that replied to the questionnaire have not answered this question - and another two have answered “No” or “No change” (Appendix 1.3). It seems unrealistic that a museum does not want to develop certain facilities or add to current communication features. These answers also reflect that there are simply no development plans at the moment, that development has been de-prioritised or that some museums do not dare to look too far ahead as

development of any sort will require new structures and new ways of thinking (Casey 2001; 2003; Cargo and Cargo 2001). The latter will cause some museums to leave their 'comfort zone', which may seem too daunting in times of financial hardship and possible reduction in staff. It is a challenge for a profession that is resistant to change to look ahead (Black 2012: 8). It would seem this statement can be seen in many of the replies.

It is also interesting to see how a few museums seem to have a very clear focus on future tasks - even if they might not involve long-term perspectives. The Glencoe and North Lorn Folk Museum describes specific activities that may expand communication activities in the future. The Orkney Museum, Highland Folk Museum and Dover Museum also mentions specific areas that they would like to build on in the future (Appendix 1.3). Although short, these descriptions show that some museums are thinking about communication activities that might develop into new areas of expertise or expand current areas of interpretation.

Summary of Chapter 5

Although museums are well-known for dealing with the past this work also naturally involves looking ahead. Planning new exhibitions, events and learning activities, preparing emergency procedures, preparing for an increase or decrease in visitor number, etc. are all factors that museums are familiar with. However, when asked directly, most museums are vague when trying to define their future role (Appendix 1.3). This is not due to indifference but rather insecurity and perhaps a general low prioritising of visitor and community communication. Up until the first educational courses in museum, visitor and heritage studies started, museum professionals had generally been trained to care for collections and less for visitors. However, human nature has a need for seeking relevance. Many museums or cultural bodies have taken on this challenge; however, new initiatives can be difficult to implement directly as part of an effective visitor communication. The Samdok example is perhaps the most concise and accurate as the project had a clear practical purpose, which made it possible to engage members from all over the country. National Strategies are generally more difficult to implement at museums as it is harder to measure the effect or outcome. National strategies can act as empowering initiatives particularly in times of financial

crisis. However, they are often very difficult to implement at a practical level. It therefore puts a big pressure on managements to turn the political planning processes into something useable.

Looking back at learning, exhibition experiences, epistemological and historical development of museum communication, the field of future studies offers new perspectives for considering museum development. Future studies is a field that offers many theories for almost all types of organisations, social groups and individuals. Museums are used to transformations and to deal with all kinds of transformative processes therefore this theory becomes particularly significant. This has often happened on a somewhat unconscious level as many museums struggle to express how their work is made relevant to visitors or indeed what exactly their visitors are searching for (Appendix 1.3). Yet, it is becoming clear that the role of the curator is changing significantly, and at the same time, museums are embracing new forms of social media as part of their outreach communication (Holt 2013; MuseumsEtc. 2013). This does not just call for a flexible communication practice, but also that all tenets of a museum are prepared to transform into new modes of communication, interaction and experience.

The various theories and practices of future studies offer new and interesting perspectives for museums. Some larger museums, like Historic Royal Palaces, are already used to applying financial and planning models in their development plans, but new partnerships between visitor attractions and forecasting companies also show how this type of transformative thought is finding its way into the museum business (Chris Farmelo and Caroline Rand; Appendix 2.3; ALVA: website). The case study shows how both forecasting companies and museums think about each other's services. Although Historic Royal Palaces has many years of experience with Trajectory, they are also aware of the limitations when it comes to predicting the future. It is interesting to note how Trajectory clearly wants their services to be viewed in connection with other practices at the museum - there definitely seems to be potential for developing the partnership to include other areas of work.

Chapter 6:

The Transformative Museum

The Transformative Museum

The term *the transformative museum* was first used in 2012 as a conference title by DREAM (Danish Research Centre on Education and Advanced Media Materials) a national research centre founded in 2004 in Denmark (DREAM: website; Nielsen 2014). The term is undoubtedly one that will be used again in many contexts as museums undertake transformations either as restorations, in mission statements or in learning and exhibition practices. In this final chapter I will try to incorporate the term as part of a new museum model based on the theories, practices and methodologies presented throughout this thesis.

Although there is clearly a new way of thinking infiltrating museums, it is important to remember that there is a difference between *change* and *transformation*. According to Oxford Dictionaries Online, *change* can be defined as “*An act or process through which something becomes different*” (Oxford Dictionaries Online: website). In logical terms, *transformation* is defined as “*A process by which one figure, expression, or function is converted into another one of similar value*” (Oxford Dictionaries Online: website). Although these two terms naturally encompass many of the same elements, it can be argued that change represents a fundamental shift in structure, character or attitude through the definition of *different*. Transformation can be seen as a development or alteration of existing approaches through *conversion* from one function or expression into something of *similar value*. It is therefore not always necessary to change in order to develop - it is possible to develop, increase or enhance current approaches without changing everything that is involved with these concepts. However, transformation can also be about smaller or more complex and direct alterations, as well as bigger and more general changes. Transformation has to be seen as a process, as defined in the museum communication definition in the Introduction. This means that it is never a fixed or firm emphasis that will remain the same throughout future museological developments. On the contrary, the process (and the concepts it influences) will develop and perhaps even change into something very different in future definitions. This is due to the constant development of the *articulation of understandings*. Transformation is a central process of the concept of understandings, and therefore (as the word itself states) never stationary.

Communication, teaching and learning are rapidly transforming and museums

have to make the past and present relevant and useful to many generations and groups simultaneously. They have to be enablers; therefore, transformation and flexibility is key. The same object may 'speak' to children through an online game or an interactive learning programme, to the elderly at reminiscence courses or through guided tours, and be the focus of expert analyses simultaneously.

Developments in postmodern museology pose an interesting question in connection with learning and exhibition theories, history and epistemologies, and future possibilities. Has the postmodern museum outlived itself and is it instead becoming a museum of transformation? Communication is necessary for transformation and is addressed in all transformative approaches. As the role of the curator changes and becomes broader and more visitor inclusive, we also see transformation of expert knowledge reach new interpretations. Museums transform knowledge and information in technology, education and learning, project work, online communication, staff employment, visitor participation, interaction and much more (Holt 2013). Museums are also preparing for the future by constantly transforming initiatives. Communication strategies therefore have to address transformations and alterations in order to implement them in an organisation and introduce the museum as a place of transformation.

We even see this development in historical epistemologies and social structures as Foucault and Luhmann defined them. Where Foucault proposed a structure and a definition of understandings, Luhmann analysed the social systems of organisations to define these developments. The discourse analysis carried out here is part of future perspectives; not just because discourse analysis is often used as part of futurology practices, but also because they propose an approach that is ready for the future. Future studies can therefore create a theory as well as a practice for all kinds of organisations to structure and determine their own future development.

The development of transformation can also be defined through Foucault's epistemological definition of modernism and postmodernism. Where modernism was about making sense and using reason, postmodernism has been about creating relevance or making sense and reason relevant. Transformation is about transforming the relevant sense and reason that postmodernism defined. A transformative museum will be a museum that transforms postmodern sense and reason for the future and makes sure that

transformation remains relevant through flexibility, discussion and participation. It may even be possible to identify a development of the postmodern episteme in a transformative episteme: this will be an episteme open to critical and constructive disturbances, in constant debate and discussion that can accommodate new ideas, thoughts and influences from all scientific, academic and practical disciplines. The transformative museum can therefore be seen as a new way of understanding and thinking. It can transform research, knowledge, education and information in connection with learning theories and exhibition practices. It can transform epistemological and philosophical understandings in connection with development of new practices and methods of communication. All of which influence communication features such as storytelling, social media, technology, social activities and museological discussions.

Postmodernism has already demonstrated that, for knowledge and information to become relevant and make sense, it has to be transformed and communicated to match different purposes, aims and objectives at different times. This is continual process. Preparing for the transformation of knowledge, information and research by using all kinds of theoretical, practical, sociological, technological and social approaches will undoubtedly be the most important task of the transformative museum. This also means that there will be no subject or theme that a museum cannot approach or discuss. Essentially, a museum in constant transformation will also be shaped by knowledge and traditions of the past, debates, discussions and trends of the present and ideas, thoughts and opportunities of the future.

Identifying Transformations

If we look back at some of the changes that were defined between modernism and postmodernism in Chapter 2 and how approaches are changing towards a constant flexible and transformative way of thinking and understanding, we see that most of the essential terms of communicative understanding are influenced by developments of modern, postmodern to transformative approaches:

Modern	Postmodern	Transformation
1) Instructive learning	Visitor interaction	Visitor influence
2) National Focus	Global Focus	World-Wide (Web)
3) Chronology	Storytelling	Participation
4) Objectivity	Subjectivity	Flexibility

Figure 2: *Essential developments in modern, postmodern and transformation tendencies.*

- 1) First of all, the more or less instructive learning style of the modern museum (and episteme) has transformed to a strong focus on visitor interaction in the postmodern understanding. However, we also see signs that it is not enough for visitors to just interact; they want to have a direct influence on the learning process as well as the social and personal experience of a museum visit. The question of how much notice museums should take of what the public says about them has recently been heavily debated. As part of the Museums 2020 campaign, the Museums Association commissioned a report published in April 2013 by BritainThinks which discussed the high level of public trust in museums (Steel 2013: 5). However, the report also showed a small public appetite for museums when it came to creating a sense of community engagement, promoting social justice and providing a forum for discussion. These conclusions sparked an intense debate about how much influence visitors should actually have. As debated in question 9 (Appendix 1.3), this discussion has questioned the methodology of museum communication. Some museum professionals responded by criticising the report for not placing enough emphasis on its findings (Steel 2013: 5). Others by focusing on how museums can best walk the difficult line of listening to visitors and at the same time hold on to their professional values. Richard Sandell, Director of School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, responded: “*The best organisations listen to the public but, at the same time, museum professionals should be guided by a set of shared values*” (Sandell 2013: 21). Alec Coles, Chief Executive Officer at

Western Australian Museum added: *“If the public do not recognise the potential of museums it is because we, as a sector, have failed to consistently communicate, or even demonstrate this potential”* (Coles 2013: 21). It seems that the best potential for communication is created at museums in constant dialogue with visitors and where visitors may even be viewed as co-organisers of cultural resources. The debate of how visitor influence can best be carried out is varied but it is also changing museums’ communication, and to some degree, their purpose. Most visitors seek a direct influence on what they learn, how they want to communicate and how they want to experience.

- 2) Whereas the modern museum tended to focus on national history and a community’s own origin, the postmodern museum became very global - even smaller local museums had to define their purpose in a global setting. Transformation’s scope is even wider than global; it has become worldwide and ‘all-knowing’ as all types of information are always accessible through digital media. More and more people join social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. because these are media through which people can participate, make contributions and gain information quickly according to interests either by joining online groups or by ‘following’ or become ‘friends’ with people. These types of communication shape how people gain new knowledge and how they want to participate and socialize. Equally, visitors expect all kinds of information to be accessible either as part of an exhibition, activity or event. This does not necessarily mean that these websites should be part of, for example, an exhibition (although new exhibitions and events are often promoted online), but online communication methods will influence how visitors interact and experience in real life.
- 3) Many modern museum models presented their exhibitions through a certain chronology, order or classification. Objects were often defined through age, size, material or use. The postmodern museum tends to focus on the stories behind the objects and often centres on historic themes or subjects. Transformation acknowledges this part of storytelling by directly adding participation. It is not a question of simply letting visitors interact with objects, collections, activities,

etc., but all of these things now have to be open to influences from visitors as well. Visitors have to be given opportunities to form their own stories, find the information they themselves find interesting and shape both activities and exhibitions by sharing and adding their own knowledge and experiences. They want to participate and they want their influences to be visible and useful.

- 4) The modern museum mostly presented collections in what can be defined as an ‘objective’ manner. The postmodern museum made it possible for museums and visitors to add their own voice in an exhibition. The transformative museum will become even more flexible as visitors will seek their own ways around knowledge interests. This means that visitors will sometimes seek out expert knowledge, but also explore social participation, digital media and so on. Presentation, interaction and interpretation will become more and more flexible and in constant transformation as requests become broader and have to be aimed at all kinds of visitors and users (Nielsen 2014).

The transformative museum is not necessarily ‘just’ another museum model. We see tendencies in epistemological developments towards transformation and concepts of transformations as educational tools as well. The communication that takes place within a system of transformation will be shaped by knowledge, information and traditions of the past, debates, discussions and trends of the present and ideas, thoughts and opportunities of the future. It will be a communication that is in constant transformation where the *past* will provide knowledge, collected data and research that develop in new ways as ideas, research and communication evolve. The *present* will provide disturbances, ‘noises’ and trends in the shape of new technology, learning methods, debates, activities, storytelling, and social participation. The *future* will provide new possibilities, opportunities and ideas in constant movement.

COMMUNICATION MODEL OF TRANSFORMATION:

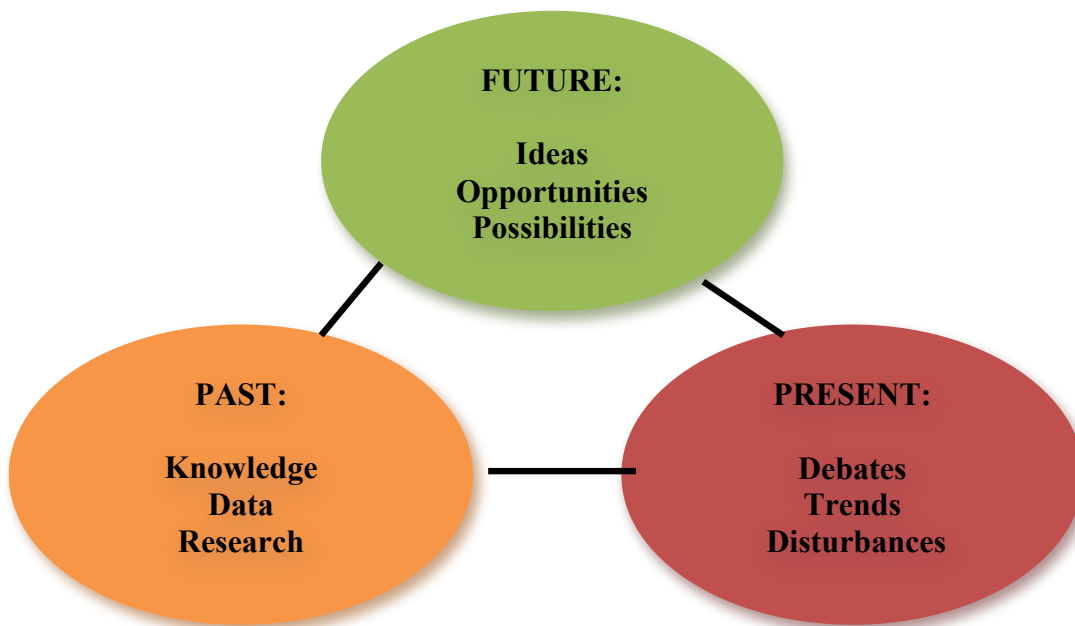


Figure 3: *Communication that takes place within a system of transformation will be shaped by features from future, present and past.*

Transformative Approaches

The basis for talking about a new museum model or even a new epistemological understanding develops from a series of common disciplines already described and outlined:

- **Museum Theory:** Firstly, we see how the different learning and exhibition theories develop in terms of, not just visitor interaction and participation, but also how they require of museums to be flexible and transform their knowledge into relevance for people in the twenty-first century. These theories can be useful when analysing exhibition spaces, identifying visitors and defining communication methods as the case studies demonstrate. However, they also prove how transformation and flexibility are necessary in all aspects of museum theory and practice.

- **Museum Practice:** Theory is, of course, closely connected to the daily museum practice where storytelling, learning programmes and online activities are complementing exhibitions and displays as essential communication methods. Most importantly, we see elements of transformations taking place in the role of curators as their responsibilities become broader and more communicative:
 - **Brendan Carr, curator, Reading Museum:** *“Some people think that curators are a fount of all knowledge; that’s fine but I don’t think you should just be a human Google and you should, instead, direct inquirers to make discoveries for themselves”* (Holt 2013: 30).
 - **Michelle Brown, community curator, London Transport Museum:** *“One day I might be accessioning posters, the next working with artists”* (Holt 2013: 33).
 - **Mark Macleod, operations and projects curator, Museum of the University of St Andrews:** *“Curators can no longer think of themselves as ‘the experts’ without being able to qualify it. It’s probable the Wikipedia model will infiltrate the museum sector providing multiple theories for an object that will provide the viewer with a much larger context about it”* (Holt 2013: 32).

It is interesting to note that two of the quotations above mention *Google* and *Wikipedia*. Online media are not just shaping how communication takes place, but are also like to shape the future role of curators and communicators too. Libraries across the UK are already recruiting ‘Wikipedians’ because Wikipedia has proven to be one of the most important channels for libraries to give access to people (BBC, News - Scotland: website). As social media becomes an important channel for communication, museum staff spends an increasing amount of time interacting with the public through these sites. This makes the communication model of transformation even more important as museums have to encompass past, present and future.

- **Epistemology:** Modernism and postmodernism have often been used as philosophical approaches to explain or outline the history of museums or their

historical development. However, as museum theory and practice develop, postmodernism is transforming into a different kind of understanding.

Postmodernism can encompass many different theories and approaches but they are not always very concise or clear in their outline. It is therefore appropriate to talk about a new and more concise way of understanding both within museums and in epistemological understandings. This may even assist museums in finding and articulating a clearer structure for their purposes and aims.

- **Sociology:** This is closely connected to the epistemological understandings as museums begin to transform their knowledge to all kinds of media and groups of people no matter if they are physically present or not. Knowledge becomes available to groups of people at different levels as it is transformed to stories, technology, exhibitions, online exhibitions and activities, learning, education, video games, academic articles and so on. Essentially, knowledge becomes social as well as personal - but also accessible to everyone. Communication will therefore have an impact on sociological perspectives of both museums and visitors.

These definitions will form The Transformation Museum as a museum:

- of flexibility
- of participation
- of innovation
- open to critique, new challenges and suggestions
- that embraces media, technology, new and old traditions and approaches
- that asks as many questions as possible and often even more than it answers
- that motivates and stimulates curiosity
- that is not afraid to take risks or to be provocative

- that takes up relevant subjects and themes
- that challenges expert knowledge through themes, discussions, participation and innovation

Phases of Transformation

The transformation that takes place between modern, postmodern and transformative understandings is perhaps best illustrated through the dynamics of a spiral model: a so-called Nautilus model. Spiral models - of various kinds - are often used in connection with innovation development and can be implemented to suit many different strategies (Beck and Cowan 1996). The model I have created here encompasses how social systems often circle around themselves and their own inner logic in a closed self-referencing system. However, as they begin to explore new opportunities and challenges the spiral becomes wider. The wider the spiral becomes, the greater the chance (or risk) for disturbances. The figure illustrates how museums can open up when exploring new opportunities, how they can create new innovative approaches and how they themselves can create transformations that may lead to the development of new systems:

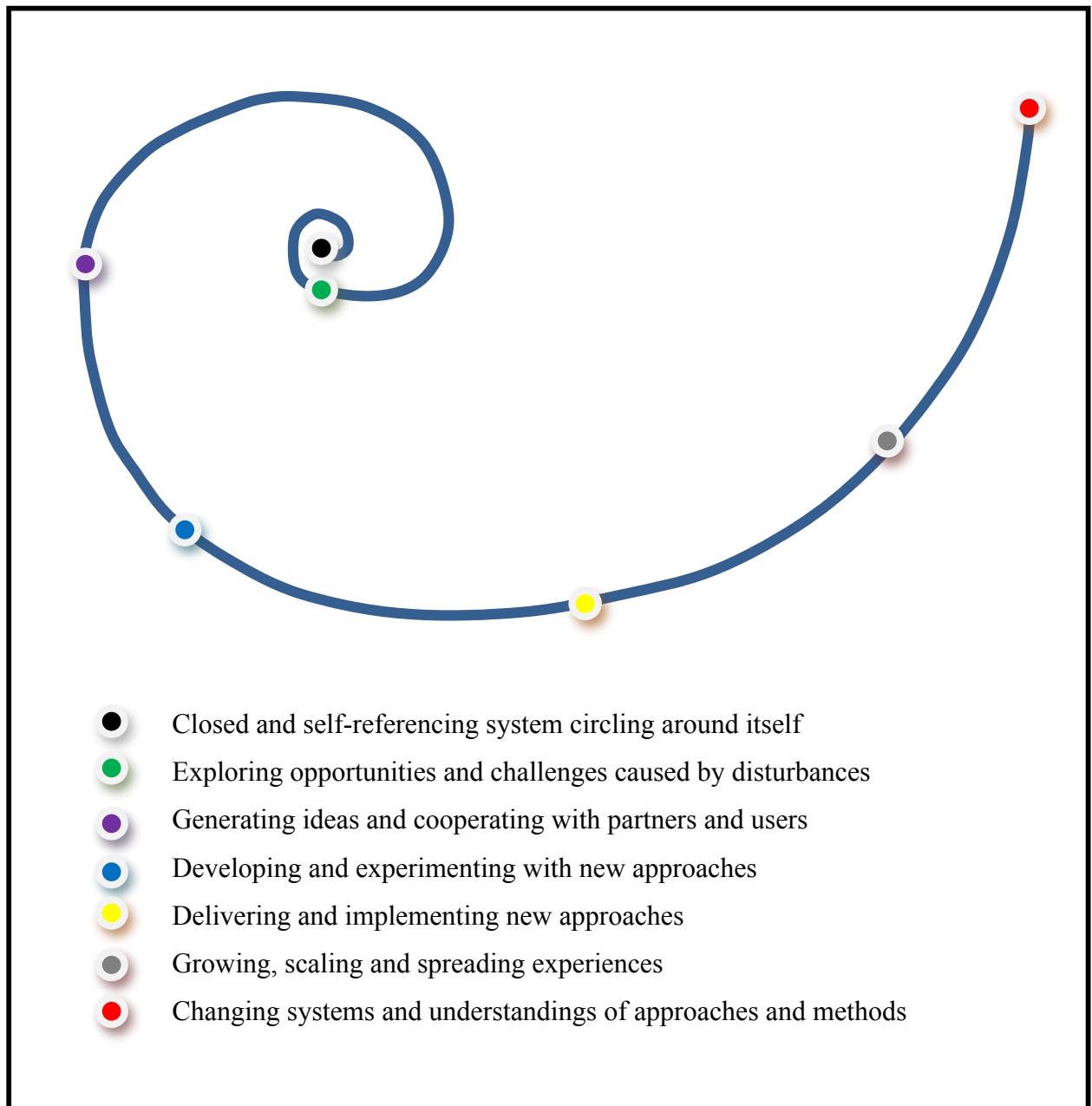


Figure 4: Nautilus model showing phases of transformation. This particular model is inspired by an innovation model created by Nesta (Nesta: website).

The Future of Transformations

The idea and concept of future studies and transformations have to be made useful and relevant to work in a museological context. This can take place at many levels:

- **Practical examples:** Firstly, the need for more case studies from museums that have experience with the work of futurologists is greater than ever. These

museums also have the potential to broaden their future work to communication practices, planning strategies and purpose definitions.

- **Theoretical approaches:** The current discussions of future studies and changing roles of museums will likely lead to the implementation of future study elements in museological educations. Many universities already offer courses specialising in digital heritage, cultural interpretation and visitor communication. Modules of future studies and museological transformations are likely to follow these perspectives on educational and theoretical levels.
- **Research:** A closer cooperation between museum professionals and experts in futurology will secure implementation of future thinking in museological research. This may well happen at universities and in connection with educational programmes but also as part of future practices at museums that use futurology as part of their planning processes.

The more museum professionals are concerned with future elements of transformations the better will they be prepared for future challenges. The aforementioned points could be interesting starting points towards making future thinking an important part of museology. We see developments happening already in all three aspects of museology. This development will inevitably shape the concept of the transformative museum and outline further options of practical, theoretical and research developments.

Summary of Chapter 6

As museums gradually experiment with flexibility and future perspectives in exhibition, research and communication practices, the different assets and challenges of the transformative model will become more evident. This will shape new approaches and experiments in both theory and practice. However, the model demonstrates that futurology as a discipline and practice can be directly implemented in museology and therefore becomes a relevant approach.

There is another important purpose for defining a new museum model that revolves around the principles of transformation: as museums always try to reach out to new audiences and challenge and inspire current visitors with new stories, they also have to be on the forefront of what will come next. They have to pave the road to the world they want to create before it is actually ready. It is not enough to sit and wait for what might be coming; as long as many museums still do that they will always be overwhelmed and daunted by new approaches and communication methods.

As stated in the introduction of Museums Association's vision from July 2013, *Museums Change Lives*: "*The time is right for museums to transform their contribution to contemporary life*" (Museums Association - *Museums Change Lives*: website). By creating new initiatives themselves, museums will be part of shaping the future. Preparing for the future will not necessarily be as difficult a task as many might think. Museums already possess knowledge of the past, have access to information and they have better opportunities than most institutions to stay updated with current trends and ideas that develop among visitors and in their communities. By embracing these aspects they are well on their way to shape, articulate and create their own future developments. Museums' own attitudes will determine future approaches (Visser 2012).

One of the biggest concerns museums seem to face is the risk of failure. Sometimes this seems to haunt museums so much that they prefer to stay free of any risks if possible. Being on the safe side of things may create stability for a while but in the long run it seems to lead to failure; visitors have to be challenged and inspired to create the proper successes every museum need. This can secure increases in visitor numbers, new visitor groups, development of new projects and new learning experiences for visitors, whilst increasing the potential for funding opportunities. However, this can only be done if museums are open to transformations and dialogues; taking risks can be the best defence against failure.

Museums do not only have to open to 'disturbances'; they also have to 'disturb' their visitors in their perspectives, beliefs and experiences. Museums must remember that communication takes place between at least two different parties; before visitors can begin to interact and participate they need to be challenged. Museums must create 'trouble' for their users in order to spark conversations and discussions of new perspectives and transformations.

Conclusion

*“You’ll conquer the present
suspiciously fast
if you smell of the future
and stink of the past”*

(Hein 2002: 74).

I began this thesis with a short poem by Piet Hein describing just how much humans are influenced by history. It may not be easier looking back but it can be more comforting and secure as the past has already happened. However, the present will be shaped by future wishes, hopes and needs too. Forming the present is not only about what *has* happened, it is also about what *will* happen.

This research set out to explore how communication has and will develop in museums and how it has influenced essential disciplines, approaches and understandings in museological contexts. As communication is at the heart of everything a museum does, these questions can be answered and explored in a number of ways; through learning approaches, historical developments, exhibition interaction, visitor participation, museological research and so on. From these perspectives it is easy to define research questions large enough to form several PhDs on issues concerning everything from Foucault’s and Luhmann’s definitions on developments in social systems, developments of exhibition and learning theories and approaches, epistemological and philosophical developments of museum communication, to new museological approaches following debates and discussions on museum research. In addition, communicative features that museums have only recently begun to approach are explored: interactive exhibition features and social media - something that has attracted research interests from many PhD students around the world.

What I have tried to approach in this thesis is first and foremost to define how changing concepts and beliefs in history and epistemology have formed new ways of approaching essential communicative tasks of exhibition interaction, learning approaches and museological research, but also how this opens up to new academic and

non-academic disciplines in museum experiences. This has not only created new theoretical perspectives on the social and epistemological theories of Luhmann and Foucault, but also created a link to the discipline of futurology as being essential to museology. These theories will develop as curators and researchers gain opportunities to create new museological methods and concepts themselves.

The main objectives of this thesis have been to discuss and analyse how museum communication has developed in both theory and practice, as well as contribute and hopefully broaden current museological debates on museum development and outreach. At the same time, this thesis sought to identify essential movements of the next museological phase of communication and understandings that is developing from postmodern thinking. Features like storytelling, online participation and futurology become vital fields in this. The aim of this thesis is therefore also to act as a catalyst for future research in museological futurology, future studies in museum learning and education, future studies in visitor participation as well as internal organisational structures of museums and futurology in museum evolution.

The main empirical perspective for this research has been the museums' own views and approaches to communication practices, exhibitions, learning, interaction and participation. These are all essential features that shape museum experiences for visitors, partners and professionals. Both practical and theoretical approaches have to follow and support each other in the development of new methods and movements of communicative experiences. This is the main reason why this thesis combines both case studies and questionnaire responses with complex theoretical discussions of museology and social theory. These methods also seem to support the main objectives of the thesis as theories, practices and methods have to follow museological debates and, at the same time, encourage and stimulate empirical approaches.

The title of this thesis had to have communication at its core, as the term is essential for all of the theories, approaches and methods encompassed in this thesis. However, most museums in the UK still seem to connect communication specifically to marketing, press contact or outreach work. It is interesting to see how the term is transforming as museums' views on both visitor interaction and internal communication develop. Although communication naturally is central in essential disciplines like exhibition learning and visitor interaction, it is also vital in the experiences shaped by

the museum - not only to visitors but to its own staff as well. This is also why the thesis has treated communication as a process as well as a concept. Essentially, museum communication forms the different articulations encompassed in everything from learning, meaning-making, interpretation, interaction to experience etc. These are all elements that seek to create understandings. As defined in the Introduction, museum communication can therefore be understood and defined as *the articulation of understandings*.

In a time of rapid change, rising responsibilities, decreased financial resources and new requirements, museums have to focus on what make them special to their local communities, society and, most importantly, to users. They have to provide visitors with the opportunity to choose and to be stimulated in new ways. Therefore, the best exhibitions or experiences are rarely the ones with the most technology, the most objects, the most glass cases, the most texts, the most interactive features or the most activities. The best exhibitions are the ones that leave something behind - either by provoking thoughts or by challenging what visitors think they already know or believe. They form new perspectives created through objects, activities, technologies and much more. What is important is that the experience is made personal, interactive, social, participatory and relevant. Museums must transform what they have to say and display to become these things. In doing so, they will create and develop efficient learning, interactive and communicative experiences that will remain and evolve in the conscience of users and museum professionals themselves.

The questions this thesis set out to answer will inevitably lead to new questions on museological evolution, communication and development. Firstly, if we look at the transformative museum model as a development of the postmodern museum one particular questions springs to mind: *What, really, are the consequences of the postmodern idea?* This question can be answered in a number of ways depending on methods and approaches. An evolutionary approach probably does not have a clear idea about the consequences of the postmodern idea yet. The idea of the transformative museum can still be seen as part of postmodern developments until it may derive enough support as a new innovative concept to stand on its own. As mentioned, transformation is a process that is constantly altered, interpreted and moved. It cannot

be a fixed term. The idea may be altered considerably as it develops through the phases of conflict and negotiations in the Transformative Cycle. However, as flexibility finds its way into museum research and practice, transformation can be an effective way of creating, shaping and developing concepts of change in museums.

Embracing flexibility and the ability to transform knowledge at museums to suit different purposes will probably also lead to the question: *When does flexibility become a lack of certainty?* It can be very difficult in practice to approach flexibility in methods and approaches without feeling insecure. The transformative museum requires flexibility - however, this cannot be defined, approached or developed without a clear certainty of purpose, aim and definition. This is where museums have to start; defining aims and purposes through clear definitions will not only support staff and management in their communication but also develop flexible and transformative approaches to visitors' inquiries. Museums can transform a lack of certainty into strength by addressing it in all phases of their work. Communication is already the core of everything a museum does, therefore it has to be addressed at all levels. Communication strategies and policies have to be strengthened and broadened to suit all groups of staff and encompass all stages of visitor participation. However, museum research also has an important responsibility to address communicative and transformative issues in academic discussions, research, case studies and practices.

The consequences of letting visitors shape experiences and participate as active contributors may raise questions of the curators' voices in exhibitions: *Who has voice? Whose voices should we listen to?* Too often curators feel their professional voices are overshadowed when everyone has a say in learning or experience activities. However, by letting visitors shape their own learning, social or communicative experiences museums have an opportunity to let their own voice become even clearer. When visitors feel their contribution is part of the experience they tend to engage even more. This engagement should be used by museums to build on knowledge, motivation and further engagement. Active participation is part of transformation too and should be embraced by professionals to form engaging experiences that provide learning and form new knowledge and experiences in visitors. The museum's role becomes that of enabler or transformer; this is probably the most important function in any learning, transformative or communicative experience.

Communication is at the heart of everything. It is necessary for transformation, development, learning, experience, interaction and progress. Some of these approaches can be identified and implemented at museums through clear and concise definitions and aims and by allowing new practical approaches to develop at museums. It will be necessary to experiment with approaches and learn from mistakes. However, museums have an opportunity to build their own way around the Nautilus spiral; creating *disturbances* for themselves and developing their own unique experiences for visitors.

Museums are nothing without the influences of users. Learning, experiencing and interacting have to be created around visitors and their interests. As museums already possess knowledge and the ability to form new perspectives for visitors, communities and professionals, they also have the possibility to become empowering motivators and enablers of learning and experiences of past, present and future. The transformation has already started in museological theory, practice and research. Some museums might be less daring in their approaches than others. However, the potential is enormous and museums have the opportunity to define the limits and perspectives of the progress themselves... they only need to take up the challenge!

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

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Appendix 1.1: List of Questions to Museums

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same). I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum.

Exhibition Learning and Communication Practice:

1: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication facilities? Can you name a few characteristics?

2: In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

3: Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

Exhibition Practice:

4: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques, etc.)?

5: Does the museum take visitors' requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

6: Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication impediments in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

Future Exhibition Communication and Learning Practice:

7: How do you think exhibition learning and communication will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

8: What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication in general at your museum?

9: What will make the museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication facilities? Are there any particular characteristics you would like to 'build on', add to or develop?

10: Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Thank you very much!

Appendix 1.2: List of Museums, Email and Research Information

The following 50 museums were approached for a reply to the questionnaire. They received the following email and description of research with the questions listed in Appendix 1.1:

List of Museums:

- 1) National Museum of Scotland, National Museums Scotland
- 2) Inverness Museum and Art Gallery
- 3) Perth Museum and Art Gallery
- 4) Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
- 5) York Castle Museum
- 6) Brighton Museum and Art Gallery
- 7) Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
- 8) The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester
- 9) Canterbury Heritage Museum
- 10) Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery
- 11) Royal Cornwall Museum
- 12) The Fitzwilliam Museum
- 13) The Ashmolean Museum
- 14) Ulster Museum, National Museums Northern Ireland
- 15) Glencoe and North Lorn Folk Museum
- 16) Museum of London
- 17) British Golf Museum
- 18) West Highland Museum
- 19) Highland Folk Museum
- 20) MUSA, St Andrews
- 21) The Sherlock Holmes Museum
- 22) Barley Hall
- 23) National Motor Museum
- 24) Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh
- 25) The people's Story Museum, Edinburgh
- 26) National Museum of Piping
- 27) Scottish Football Museum
- 28) The Geffrye Museum
- 29) Sir John Soane's Museum
- 30) The Freud Museum
- 31) Alexander Fleming Laboratory Museum
- 32) Aberdeen Art Gallery
- 33) St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art
- 34) The McManus Galleries
- 35) Abbot Hall Art Gallery
- 36) MOMA WALES, The Tabernacle Collection
- 37) The Fry Art Gallery

- 38) Aberdeen Maritime Museum
- 39) The Skye Museum of Island Life
- 40) Surgeons' Hall Museum, Edinburgh
- 41) Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester
- 42) Cole Museum of Zoology, University of Reading
- 43) Elgin Museum
- 44) Orkney Museum
- 45) Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, University of Swansea
- 46) Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery
- 47) Pitt Rivers Museum
- 48) New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester Museums and Galleries
- 49) The Braid Museum and Art Centre
- 50) National Railway Museum, York

Email to Museums:

Hello,

I am writing to ask for your assistance regarding the exhibition learning and communication at *[name of museum]*. I am currently undertaking PhD research at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. My research is focusing on how museums communicate through their exhibition practices and how they view their communication and learning activities.

It is essential for my research to form a proper understanding of your museum's approaches and I will therefore like to ask if you are interested in completing a questionnaire on these subjects?

The questionnaire consists of 10 questions concentrating on learning, exhibition communication and future perspectives on these matters. It can be completed online and is found at the following link:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22EFMA9H8TF>

Attached is a document that tells more about my research and how important your answers are. You will be asked about your name and which position/title you hold at the museum. However, you may remain anonymous in the questionnaire if you wish. Your answers will be greatly appreciated all the same!

I thank you so much for your time! If you have any further comments or questions please contact me.

Thank you,

Jane K Nielsen

PhD student - Museum and Gallery Studies

School of Art History, University of St Andrews

79 North Street

St Andrews KY16 9AL

United Kingdom

Email: jkn2@st-andrews.ac.uk

(0)7926 377287

Research Information:

PhD Student:

Jane K Nielsen, Museum and Galleries Studies, School of Art History, University of St Andrews, 79 North Street, St Andrews, Fife, Scotland, KY16 9AL.

Contact: jkn2@st-andrews.ac.uk or +44 (0) 7926 377287

A bit about me: I am from Denmark and have a MA in Archaeology from Aarhus University, Denmark and a MA in Museum Studies from the University of Leicester, UK. I have been working at a varied range of museums and galleries as information assistant, assistant curator, assistant registrar and just before I started my PhD studies in St Andrews I worked two years as a project manager developing new learning programmes at a coastal museum in North Jutland, Denmark.

Supervisor: Dr Ulrike Weiss, Lecturer, Museum & Gallery Studies, School of Art History, University of St Andrews, 79 North Street, St Andrews, KY16 9AL.

Contact: uew@st-andrews.ac.uk or +44 (0) 1334 462410

Research Subject: Estimated research period: September 2011 - September 2014.

The research project is entitled '*Museum Communication: Learning, Interaction and Experience*' and focuses on museum communication and learning by looking at how museums have developed and approached their learning and communication practices throughout their existence - and intend to do so in the future. The research concentrates on the development of different learning, interaction and communication styles and how future communication strategies on these matters may be approached. Essential are practical perspectives on how museums approach visitors and how they make their collections and exhibitions interact with audiences.

Appendix 1.3: Questionnaire Statistics

The questionnaire was sent to 50 different museums throughout the UK. 15 museums replied to the questionnaire which means that 30% of the asked museums replied. Some museums replied to all questions - others just to some of the questions:

Number of museums that answered the questions:

Question 1	15
Question 2	14
Question 3	14
Question 4	15
Question 5	15
Question 6	15
Question 7	15
Question 8	14
Question 9	13
Question 10	5

Appendix 1.4:

Questionnaire Responses from Museums:

The questionnaire was sent to 50 museums throughout the UK. The following 15 answers were received during the spring and summer 2012.

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

Leicester Museums and Galleries Liz Wilson Collections, Interpretation and Learning Manager

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE:What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

Access to artefacts, neutral learning space, specialist staff - the same as all other museums really.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

Creative and Cultural Ambassadors scheme <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/lc/leicester-city-museums/learning/cultural-ambassadors/cca-scheme/>

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

We work in partnership with schools and community groups to deliver nearly every new project or exhibition that we deliver.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

Yes - we use different tools for interpretation for each of our exhibition. This include A/V DVD's i-pads applications, object handling, hands on activities, story sacks, CGI etc.

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

Yes, we undertake annual visitor surveys, have a museums consultation panel, undertake specific exhibition evaluation and work in partnership on nearly every exhibition.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

Yes - we offer a range of interpretation elements to enable access.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

Yes - our curatorial voice will become more diverse as we embrace interculturalism.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

Reduction in specialist staff

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same) I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

The Fry Art Gallery David Oelman - Vice Chairman/Trustee c.11,000 visitors last year No staff

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

We have several volunteer lecturers who cover different approaches to the collection. We also have a team of volunteers for marketing. Key stage 1 & 2 packs are available on our website.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

Publicity in the national press creates more visitors.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

We have a policy to engage with local groups especially schools.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

We aim to show the best work available with the help of a catalogue.
5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?
No. We have a limited and specific collection so the exhibitions always reflect this.
6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?
No. but on the other hand we have never been asked and we are a very small gallery.
7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE:How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?
No changes are envisaged but we are more available electronically than before on the web, facebook, twitter etc. We also run a series of lectures for the public.
8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?
We generally expect our visitors to know what they are looking at, or just to enjoy the visual experience
9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?
No change.
10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:
Carolyn Graves-Brown Curator Egypt Centre Swansea University
1.LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE:What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?
Use of child volunteers High level of low-tech interactive aids
2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?
Use of volunteers of all ages and abilities to communicate Low tech aids

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?
Yes and yes
4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?
Yes
5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?
Yes- we have visitor surveys and consult with our volunteers
6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?
Yes
7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?
In University museums the importance of impact in the REF may result in museums making more use of academics.
8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?
Lack of space and resources
9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?
Volunteers of all ages and abilities
10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:
National Museum of Piping. James Beaton, Project Manager
1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms

of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?
Provides an overview of the history of the Great Highland Bagpipe and bagpipes from other parts of Europe.
2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?
We find that our relationship with the National Museums of Scotland work best for us. The collection is actually theirs and we house it and make it available
3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?
No
4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?
We have a film about the bagpipes, which complements the display
5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?
No
6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?
We offer audio guides in the major European languages
7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?
More use of digital technology, also for us, audio posts will be important.
8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?
Lack of space
9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?
No
10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?
No

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh Susan Gardner, Curator approx 220 000 visitors per yr staff - 3 front of house, 2 shop/reception, 1 part time curator - we're very short-staffed at the moment

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

I don't think the museum is unique in that respect. We don't do anything particularly differently to other museums.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

I think that staff are the most important resource. Dedicated staff are required if the museum is going to make an impact both through communicating with visitors in the museum and promoting our activities to the wider world. A dedicated budget also helps.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

This is dealt with by our Public Programmes Manager. I'm afraid I don't have any detailed information.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

The museum uses fairly traditional information panels and captions supported by hands-on activities wherever possible e.g dressing-up, role play. We are limited by budget constraints.

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

We would certainly take visitors' requests into consideration but rarely receive any relating to specific elements of exhibitions.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

We are sometimes able to offer handling sessions for the visually impaired. The Council offers a translation service on request but this is probably not practical for museum visitors. Space for printed material is already limited so it would be difficult to provide information in other languages. In a city like Edinburgh with visitors from all over the world, which languages would you pick and how many? Audio guides and other forms of technological communication are

prohibited by cost.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

I'm sure that lots of museums will experiment with new technology using mobile phones and other portable devices, however, these change so quickly it may be difficult to commit to one method/device. People are increasingly comfortable with film, a/v presentations and in-person interpretation but I think there will always be a role for printed communication too.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

The challenges are keeping up with the expectations of an increasingly sophisticated audience in terms of technology and making sure that if we embrace these means of communication they are meaningful and not just gimmicks.

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

We would like to have more staff in the galleries to engage with visitors and to facilitate hands-on experiences and activities.

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

There are lots of exciting methods of communication/interpretation that we would love to be able to make use of but, as always, we are constrained by the lack of resources.

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

The Orkney Museum Tom Muir Exhibitions Officer c. 30,000 visitors per annum

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

The Orkney Museum is held in Tankerness House, an historic Grade A listed building dating from the 16th century and has a public garden at the back. As a town house of a merchant laird family, the Baikies, we have interpretation about the house and family within the museum. It is also visited by local school groups as an historic building as well as a museum. The collection itself covers all periods of Orkney's prehistory and history and is the main museum for the islands.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

The Orkney Museum is very active in helping visiting television (and radio) programme makers with information and access to artefacts in our collection. We work with both foreign and UK production companies. The BBC receives lots of help from us and as a result our museum and staff (mostly me, actually) has recently appeared on the BBC 1 early evening magazine

programme 'The One Show' with an estimated 20 million viewers, and on a forthcoming episode of the popular BBC television show 'Coast'. We have also appeared on Channel 4's 'Time Team' programme, as well as many other TV and radio programmes (usually several times in the course of the year). This promotes not only us but the Orkney Islands throughout the world. We are also featured regularly in both the local newspaper and BBC Radio Orkney, where we also have a regular history feature in one of their shows.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

We have a temporary exhibition programme which sees new exhibitions every month throughout the winter, with a five month summer exhibition from May-September. In recent years we have featured exhibitions on local groups such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Boy's Brigade, Royal British Legion, Kirkwall Operatic Society, etc. We have also featured school arts projects as well as giving tours to local school groups and visiting schools. We have also included a church youth group and Disability Orkney in our outreach. We work closely with the Orkney College and the Nordic Studies Centre where we give information and advice on a regular basis.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

We do use DVDs and computers within displays, but we are limited with the resources available. What I try to do, whenever possible, is to use first-hand account of events. I am also a professional storyteller, so I use my understanding and experience of using stories as a way to connect with the visitors. If it is put in terms that they can identify with, either by description or feelings of eye-witnesses, then it becomes much more real. It is no longer something that happened a long time ago but a shared experience.

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

Up to a point. We have done visitor surveys, but I am not personally aware of what the feedback is. We do work with local groups when approached, as I've already stated, but as the museum covers most of Orkney's past (alongside other museums) I have seldom heard any requests from visitors. We also provide gallery space for local artists as well as social history or archaeological exhibitions, so most of our winter shows are of artwork. We are much in demand by local (and international) artists.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

Unfortunately this is a weak point in the Orkney Museum due to limited funds. Most of our visitors are English speakers but we have tried to produce small laminated sheets with information on the galleries in various languages, but this is not possible with temporary exhibitions. I try to make exhibition text as clear as possible and I give a brief summary of the story in larger sized font just under a title so that you can read a little bit and still get an understanding of the content.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

Technology will improve and as it does so it will become cheaper to use. Maybe more audio methods will be used in museums, but again this will depend on cost.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

Finance, or rather the lack of it. But we will keep trying to provide the best service that we can and to continue to work with our friends at the Orkney Collage and Nordic Studies Centre, as well as archaeologists and historians working in Orkney, to interpret our past.

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

We lost our Education Officer several years ago due to cuts within the service and since then our schools outreach has not been very good. We would like to build on this with more guided school visits and working closer with schools on local history projects. Our existence has meant that archaeological finds made in Orkney now stays in the islands rather than going to the National Museums Scotland in Edinburgh. By keeping our own heritage in Orkney we attract both visitors and academic researchers to the museum. We display Orkney finds and interpret them for both tourists and locals alike.

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

I am proud of this museum. I have worked here in various posts for the last 24 years and saw the museum expand and improve. There is still much scope for improvement and updating permanent galleries, but we are limited as to what we can do because of our budget. We work hard to promote Orkney and its amazing story from prehistoric and historic times. We have a dedicated team who care passionately about what we do and about Orkney and its heritage.

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

Highland Folk Museum Rachel Chisholm Assistant Curator Visitor number for 2011 (April-October) - approx 50,000 13 permanent staff approx 28 seasonal staff (April-Oct)

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

The Highland Folk Museum is an open air museum covering 80 acres. The museum consists of re-located and re-constructed buildings. We have an unique reconstructed early 1700s Highland Township

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

We have leaflets, website etc but are working with a very small advertising budget.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

We have worked with groups on specific projects.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

We don't have galleries but tell our story through interpreted buildings.

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

We carry out visitor surveys and do put into practice suggestions from the public.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

We have an audio visual presentation (19mins) in five different languages. We also have some audio in buildings

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

We are at the start of a project to build a new storage facility on site. This will allow the public some access to the accessioned collection in the future through store tours. We also have plans to relocate three buildings onto the site over the next 18 months.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

Funding

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

We are one of only a handful of open air museums in the country. There is a 10 year plan to build a new reception area with gallery space.

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

MOMA WALES Ruth Lambert Exhibitions Organiser 19,478 visitors in 2011 Staff 3 & 1 part-time

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

Free access Bi-lingual (Welsh and English) Rural location Independently funded

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?
Volunteer Gallery Attendants are our most important link with the public. Our website is crucial.
3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?
The Auditorium, Foyer, Green Room, Art Studio and Coffee Shop all play a part in engaging with community groups
4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?
No. Lack of funding.
5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?
Yes, yes, yes. Most exhibitions have been recommended by fellow artists or arranged to help artists with Arts Council of Wales grants
6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?
No. Everything we do is designed for all the public.
7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?
There is no substitute for personal interaction. We hope that will continue.
8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?
Finance and strong leadership.
9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?
Being able to continue our present unique contribution to the arts. We would like to be able to bring in more exhibitions from outside Wales.
10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?
We wish you well with your research.

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

National Museums Scotland, C Sexton, Exhibition Co-ordinator aprox 450 staff aprox 1 million visitors

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

I do not think that we are unique in terms of Learning and communication. Only the objects an the way chosen to display them is unique. Within special exhibitions and perm displays we try to provide visitors a variety of ways to engage with the objects, using new technology, hands on interactivity and traditional text and images.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

As a national we are fortunate to have a lot of in house expertise including an L&P office and a marketing office, they are probably better placed to answer this question. However, we do employ external designers, specialist interactive builders and film makers to bring in fresh ideas and vision in terms of communicating and engaging with our visitors.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

The exhibition department deal with the intrinsic communication elements within the exhibition e.g. exhibition narrative; text and imagery; AV displays, interactives as well (particularly in special exhibitions) theatrical techniques to enhance the visitors experience. Programming and web resources are informed by the exhibition content, and compliment the exhibition but is carried out by a separate departments

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

Yes - we have a strategic framework which catogorises exhibition types according to visitor experiences - these profiles match specific visitor profiles for NMS as well as our brand identity. Our programme of special exhibitions are then aligned to these exhibition types to target visitor types at certain times of the year. In addition for large special exhibitions, exhibition ideas may be market tested to ensure that they are viable prior to us proceeding with the exhibition.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

We have an exhibitions for all policy which ensures that our exhibitions are designed to take in to account various disabilities. Audio guides and translations are used for some of our permanent displays, however for special exhibitions this is not feasible.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

I think that digital media will become more and more important when delivering special exhibitions, however a low tech 'real' experience with actual objects may become an antidote to a media rich world.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

keeping up with fast changes in digital media, software and hardware

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

As I noted in point 2. I do not think that learning and communication will make us unique. It will be the objects which do this.

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same) I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road Manchester M13 9PL.
Henry McGhie, Head of Collections and Curator of Zoology. 350,000 visitors per year.

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

-engagement with current research and researchers -recognition of different learning styles and motivations in interpretation -tackling difficult or complex subjects in honest manner -intellectually grounded bravery -focusing on encouraging people to think for themselves, rather than telling them what to think -repositioning museum with colonialist and imperialist origins in postcolonial context -engaging with big societal issues

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

-staff who are well integrated across teams (specialists in learning, curatorial specialists who work well and regularly with one another, rather than in silos), participating visitors, exhibition design, a completely wonderful collection and reflective approach to developments

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

Yes, and is well recognised for this. Ongoing programme of engaging members of the community

and respectful approach to different voices and opinions.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

-objects -texts -non-visual texts/interpretation (eg. through design, supporting non-collections objects) -trained visitor services assistants -smartphone app in one gallery -developing haptic technology -object handling mediated by volunteers

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

-sometimes- depends on the nature of feedback -definitely in terms of longer term or major developments -regular visitor surveys and market research, bespoke questions for specific exhibits or events

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

-yes- have audio described tours available, development of text and images takes notice of needs of intended audiences (which are generally aimed at non-specialist adult for adult themed shows, or for other visitor groups depending on the show). Have used audio guides. Web materials developed with recognition of visitors with special needs.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

-aim to be a leading museum which engages people with objects, ideas and one another. Regularly publish experiences (eg. in Museums Etc. series) -increasingly, greater integration between different aspects of museum work. -collecting for exhibitions likely to become increasingly important

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

-like the Red Queen, we have to keep running in order to stay still. We strive for excellence, so turn challenge to opportunity

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

-relationship between audiences and academic discourses, with use of collections

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

Sarah Baines Collections Centre Facilitator MOSI, Manchester 700,000 visitors per year (see DCMS website for exact figures) Approx. 150 members of staff

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

* Public programmes team give performances of historical characters associated with the region.
* Much interpretation and learning uses the unique historical museum site.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

* Dedicated marketing dept ensure effective external communication. * Internal staff communication is always a priority due to the size of the museum. * External designers are used to develop effective marketing materials.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

* Dedicated community development officer works full time on engaging with new audiences and liaising with local communities. * Rolling programme of community exhibitions means collaboration between museum staff and local communities. * Community members integrally involved with development of community exhibitions.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

All of the above. * Interactive elements are used in conjunction with interpretation panels and labels. * Personal stories are used wherever possible to make material engaging and interesting to visitors.

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

We have visitor comment cards and people can get in touch with our curators directly on request. However there is not official system of public consultation in the gallery development process (with the exception of the community exhibition gallery).

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

* All galleries are DDA 2010 compliant as per museum policy. * Large print information is available. * Front of house staff are trained in assisting visitors with different accessibility needs.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

Main change: more input from education staff in the exhibition development process. (Even) greater accessibility of museum text and displays.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

Ongoing challenge: balancing needs of family visitors with needs of specialist visitors.

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

* More will be made of the museum location and site, making the museum more coherent in its narrative message and impact.

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery/Birmingham Museums. This includes nine museum sites and as of 1st April this year, it includes Thinktank which incorporated the previous Museum of Science. and Industry. In total we have approximately 250 staff and attract over a million visitors a year.

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

I don't unique is the best word to stress because I don't believe it is the ultimate sanction. The strengths in the organisation is probably the diversity of its learning as its museums sites are so different and represent the diversity of the collections that they hold and represent. It ranges from a working watermill which inspired Tolkein, an historic jewellery factory, a Jacobean House, a main City museum and art gallery, a medieval castle. We don't have a one size fits all learning programme - sites work with different communities and attract different interest groups. The learning offer is various - guided tours, self-guided learning, exhibition and gallery interpretation, events and talks programmes, school visits etc. One of our strengths is that we have strong track record in working cultural diverse audiences.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

I think that learning and communication are quite different areas. The basic resources are skilled staff and money. In terms of learning we have developed regular programmes, in-house guidelines around interpretation and a dedicated schools learning zone. In terms of marketing, the key thing is sufficient marketing budgets.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

We have a dedicated Community gallery which works with community groups across the West Midlands to develop exhibitions and this has been running for three years. In addition we have a Community Action Panel which meets regularly and is actively involved in most projects and

developments. The museum also supports an Asian Women's Textile group. Community and visitor groups, including schools are also at times involved in contributing to the main exhibitions programme.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

Each exhibition sets its own demands and is distinct in its form and content. Mechanisms of interpretation and communication vary from exhibition to exhibition. The content it communicates through what it is and what kinds of narrative and meanings it made hold. We always have some form of interpretation, and which may include labels, text panels, film and oral history, freestanding interpretation units, resource areas for families, trail, exhibition and activity guides, bespoke physical interactives, AV effects etc

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

Because each exhibition is different, the responses that visitors make to one exhibition generally don't have any relevance to the following exhibition. We ensure that the layout and presentation of exhibitions meets access needs - sufficient lighting, wheelchair accessibility, large size text, family friendly activity, seating, clear language. If visitors make comments which suggest positive and manageable changes that can be made during an exhibition, then we will implement them depending on resources.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

Yes, depending on resources. We aim to ensure that film is subtitled for instance, but we quite a lot of things we no longer have the resources to maintain, such as audio guides or translation.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

In Birmingham the key thing is that we respond to and engage young people and cultural diverse audiences who are key sectors of the city's constituency and offer has to engage and be relevant to their interests and needs. Digital communication is a key area of future development.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

About sustaining underlying resources - sufficient budgets and staff to deliver a programme and to be able to invest in both the infrastructure and core of the organisation, as well as the additionality

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

Quality rather than uniqueness is the driver for the museum. Raising standards, widening our offer and building on our work with young people and diverse audiences are significant drivers. I would like to see more imaginative and creative learning offer.

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

Dover Museum Miss Kim Norton Education Officer 37,000 3 full time, 5 part time and casuals

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

Offer a wide range of workshops for schools. Willing to adapt and develop workshops to suit needs of groups

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

Essential to be available to deal directly with teachers booking visits, to answer questions, provide information etc. Be flexible in approach and be adaptable to suit needs of groups.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

Have a small museum youth group who helped put together the current temporary exhibition. Worked with local ex mining groups on a Coalfield Heritage Project - CHIK

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

Touch screen Computers in Bronze Age Boat Gallery

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

All survey results looked at and considered As previously mentioned museum youth group helped with current temporary exhibition

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

In main galleries and Boat gallery signs in English and French. Video and computers in Boat Gallery available in French, German, and Dutch. School workshops adapted for special needs groups. Video on loop system

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

More interactive things

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

Cost - lack of budget

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

Continue to develop new workshops for schools Make more exhibits interactive and more accesible

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art and Provand's Lordship. Clare Gray Learning and Access Curator Visitor figs per annum approx 125,000 Staff - 11 Visitor Assistants (at full capacity), 1 Scottish History Curator, 2.5 Learning Assistants, 1 Learning and Access Curator (who has responsibility for 2 other venues as from May 2012), 3 Cleaners, 2 shop staff, 4 cafe staff, 1 Museum Manager (who has responsibility for 2 more venues, Assistant Museum Manager, Assistant Programming Officer Currently we also house the Curious project which is funded by Legacy Trust and will be with us until early 2013. There is 1 Project Curator, 1 Exhibition Curator, 1 Clerical Assistant, 2 Learning Assistants.

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE: What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

St Mungo is unique in that it is one of only 4 museums in the world dedicated to religion. (There are others which are focused on a single religion). The comparative approach St Mungo takes is unique in itself. Some of the learning programmes at St Mungo are unique in their tackling of issues. St Mungo mission statement to promote understanding and respect between those all faith and of none. This is reflected in the learning programme such as Bigot Busters which tackles sectarianism and is aimed at P6/7 and S1/2 pupils. The Faith to Faith series of adult talks sometimes explores a faith and its practices and other times examines difficulties people may face within their faith such as gender and sexuality. Temporary exhibitions in St Mungo often explore element of faith, belief or perceptions that look at elements not always brought out into the light. An example being the 'Stardust: some thoughts on death' exhibition which ran Nov 2010 - June 2011. The exhibition examined perceptions towards death. Around 100 people of all faiths and none took part. Glasgow artist Gillian Steel, gathered their ideas and thoughts and created an exhibition from them.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

In terms of learning I feel that a dedicated learning team is an important resource. While it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to the visitor experience, staff dedicated to learning can build their knowledge through experience and training to ensure experiences offered are in line with current educational practice. There are a range of contacts that are usefule to the museum from formal institution such as schools and colleges, to informal groups such as YWCA, Contact

the Elderly, local arts groups etc.

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

Yes, we have built up relationships with specific contacts that are local. For instance, when we would like to pilot new ideas for schools we invite the 2 schools closest to us to pilot them. Through the Curious project we have piloted a training programme with a college (City of Glasgow College) close by. We do not have a specific strategy for knowledge sharing or content creation. However, our two latest temporary exhibitions (Stardust: some thoughts on death and the Curious exhibition) have been created with members of public. The Stardust exhibition involved museum visitors taking part in interviews and a symposium and Gillian Steel, Glasgow artist, interpreting the information given. However, Gilliam retained much of the work in the form it was given. For example, at the symposium people created scrolls which contained their unfinished business. The idea came from Buddhism, in that to die a peaceful death, you must clear your unfinished business. These scrolls were displayed sealed or open (depending on the wishes of the participant) exactly as they were created on the day. Gillian did not change any of the words people used in their interviews but made decisions about how they would be communicated (audio, visual, written). The Curious exhibition was created with a range of community groups from across Glasgow. Some individuals had a great deal of involvement in the creation of the exhibition. Others may only have attended one session and picked an object which was then interpreted by a member of another group.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE: Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

St Mungo Museum permanent galleries are unique in that the faith communities of Glasgow were consulted at the stage of creating the gallery. Where possible their wishes were met. This was not always possible, however. For instance, it was requested that the Sikh bible be displayed higher than any other bible in order to communicate its importance. As St Mungo promote equality between the religions, this was not possible. The solution was not to display a Sikh bible. The galleries display the six major faiths in Scotland. In the Life gallery the faiths are given the same size of space to show their equality.

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

St Mungo Museum permanent galleries are unique in that the faith communities of Glasgow were consulted at the stage of creating the gallery. Where possible their wishes were met. This was not always possible, however. For instance, it was requested that the Sikh bible be displayed higher than any other bible in order to communicate its importance. As St Mungo promote equality between the religions, this was not possible. The solution was not to display a Sikh bible. The galleries display the six major faiths in Scotland. In the Life gallery the faiths are given the same size of space to show their equality.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

Yes, St Mungo has various languages represented around the galleries. There are also sheets available for many languages at the front door. I can't remember off the top of my head how many, but at least 25.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think

is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

I think technology will continue to influence exhibition communication and learning. While St Mungo is not a venue that uses a great deal of technology, many more, such as Riverside, are starting to. I think accessibility issues will continue to influence exhibitions.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

Please state the name of your museum, your name and which position/title you hold at the museum (you may remain anonymous if you wish - your answers will be much appreciated all the same)I would also like to know approximately how many visitors your museum has per year and the number of staff at your museum:

Glencoe and North Lorn Folk Museum Claire Robinson, Curator Approx. no of annual visitors (based on 2011 figure, our season is Easter to end of October): 4,007 Number of staff at museum: 1 paid (Curator), 5 volunteers

1. LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICE:What makes your museum unique in terms of learning or communication? Can you name a few characteristics?

Our museum is unique due to the historic setting and character of the museum building, which provides an atmospheric backdrop to learning practice. Our second key asset is our wide-ranging collections that promote museum learning.

2. In your opinion, what resources (from within or outside the museum) are the most important in the learning and communication management of your museum? Are there for example particular marketing initiatives, contacts or cooperation that work well for the museum?

3. Has the museum built special contacts with local community groups (like e.g. schools or other institutions) about specific programmes or activities? If so: Does the museum have a strategy or programme for engaging community groups directly in knowledge sharing or content creation of new communication or learning activities?

The museum has close links with local primary schools. We have delivered an education and outreach service through school visits (in-house and going out to schools) and two loan boxes.

4. EXHIBITION PRACTICE:Does the museum use specific communication elements in the galleries and exhibitions (e.g. visual effects, special technology, specific story telling techniques etc.)?

We have an audio tape to accompany a display on the Glencoe Massacre.

5. Does the museum take visitors requests into consideration when planning and creating new exhibitions (e.g. suggestions or responses from visitor surveys or general requests)? If so: How do you go about that?

I do not believe that this has been the case in the past. We have now started to gather visitor information using an evaluation form, which will enable us to take visitor requests into consideration.

6. Does the museum consider visitors with particular learning or communication difficulties in its exhibition practice and does it offer particular accessibility features for these visitors (like e.g. audio guides, translation into other languages, sign language or others)?

We are looking into the translation of interpretation into other languages.

7. FUTURE EXHIBITION COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING PRACTICE: How do you think exhibition learning and communication in general will be shaped in the future? What do you think is most likely to change or develop? Any particular parts of exhibition and display practices?

I think that our exhibition communication and learning practice will be shaped by curatorial/staffing practice (there have been a number of staffing changes in the museum over the last few years) and the grant funding that is available to support education programmes.

8. What do you see as the biggest challenges for future museum learning and communication at your museum?

Major challenges facing the museum at present are lack of funds, space and volunteers to help with the delivery of learning and interpretation. The museum currently does not have the funds to employ new communication technologies (audio-visual displays, interactives). The museum also does not have a dedicated learning/education space in which to deliver larger scale museum learning events or projects. For example, we would like to work with local schools more and create displays featuring their work but this is not possible. Similarly, the amount of time available for the planning and delivery of educational events is constrained by current staffing/volunteer levels at the museum.

9. What will make your museum unique in the future in terms of learning and communication? Are there any particular characteristics or facilities you would like to "build on", add to or develop?

We would like to capitalise on the historic setting and traditional appearance of the museum building (it's unique selling product) by developing an education programme that makes use of these assets to inspire and educate our visitors. We are piloting a costumed interpretation event called 'Meet the Jacobites' this month (funded by Museums Galleries Scotland) and storytelling event in August (funded by the Scottish Book Trust). If these events are a success, we will look to expand our activities in this area in the future.

10. Any additional points you would like to make on these subjects?

As a small museum, we deliver the best exhibition and learning programme that we can with the limited funds, space and staffing resources that are available.

Appendix 2: Interviews and Email Correspondences

Appendix 2.1: Conversation with Dr Beth Lord

Appendix 2.2: Conversation with Dr Donald Smith

Appendix 2.3: Email Correspondences with Caroline Rand and Chris Farmelo

Appendix 2.1:

Conversation with Dr Beth Lord, Department of Philosophy, University of Dundee at The McManus Galleries, Dundee

- 17th May 2012:

Transcribed by Jane Nielsen, May 2012

BL: Beth Lord

JN: Jane Nielsen

JN: First of all, thank you so much for taking the time to meet up.

I would like to begin, if I may, with a question that has been puzzling me a bit since I began reading about museums and philosophical thinking: There doesn't seem to be much research or literature on museums and philosophical thinking - or on how philosophical thinking can influence museums. You are probably not the right one to ask because you have done a lot of research on the subject - I was just wondering why it might be? Is it not an obvious perspective? Or is there something that makes it unapproachable?

BL: *I don't know... I guess you have to look at it from both the philosophy angle and the museum angle. I guess from the museum study angle there are lots of people who are interested in theory. And that's fine but quite often they don't go any deeper to look at any philosophical angles - and if they do it is on a fairly shallow angle which is understandable because they don't have the background in that. And from the philosophy side... well, you do get philosophers who are interested in art, obviously you get philosophers who are interested in history, you get philosophers who are interested in how people organized the world. The museums have maybe been something that's too specific. Philosophers tend to be interested in art in general. So yeah, it's true... I'm aware of a few museum people who have done what they think is philosophy but it isn't really deeply philosophical. But I don't know of anyone in the philosophy world who are actually working on museums. So I agree with you; it's sort of strange that they haven't.*

JN: If you look at it historically they just seem so very interlinked... in so many ways?

BL: *Yeah, that's true... I mean... I think people working on Foucault would kind of recognize it is the things that Foucault is interested in and recognize that it is a subject that you could talk about. But it hasn't really caught on.*

JN: It leads me to my second question: What do you see as some of the biggest challenges or possibilities when it comes to approaching philosophical thinking within museums?

BL: *It's difficult to engage something philosophical and go beyond the level of just touching it shallowly - or looking at theories in a very shallow kind of way. It's challenging to bind philosophy to anything concrete - but that's true of anything. To use a parallel example: If you are doing philosophy of film it's very easy to say philosophical things about films. But it's really challenging to generally think; how can a film be doing something philosophical without just analyzing the plot or the images. But to actually think about how films work and how they can be philosophical... and the same thing goes for museums, I guess. Maybe that's people haven't been philosophical about museums too. People don't often have an understanding of how a museum actually works. I guess that may be part of it too... You need to have an understanding of how display mechanisms work and how people collect things in order to really think about how philosophy can be applied - without being shallow about it. You do need some knowledge about it.*

The challenges would be getting beyond the superficial level and really get to think about how something can be thought about philosophically. You also want to go beyond the application of how something can be and also think about how museums can think about how something can be seen as philosophical even if it is not conscious. And actually lots of people who work in museums are kind of resistant to that idea which is probably true of anything anywhere in the world. Quite often people have a certain idea about what they are doing, preserving the past or you know... and they don't necessarily want to think of themselves as philosophical.

JN: We are approaching subjects on museums and interpretation: In your articles you have argued that museums are fundamentally not about objects or collections alone - but about interpretation of the relationship between concepts and objects - or conceptual systems and things - do you feel that museums today recognize this? Are they fully aware of the question they set out to represent, do you think?

BL: *I think this is an area where people who work in museums would usually want to insist that museums are about objects. And they are about the authenticity about objects - and they are very object-focused for very understandable reasons. I wouldn't want to deny that the authentic object has a place in the museum and it's part of what distinguishes museums from other kinds of exhibit activities.*

However, I would like to suggest that it is possible to imagine museums that don't actually have objects in them. That is just about the concept of objects and the relationship of objects. You can see that for instance in the web based exhibitions. For example Neil MacGregor's "A History of the World in 100 Objects"... obviously that is based on some real objects that really exist in the British Museum but the website on its own could function as a kind of museum without the visitors calling on the museum.

JN: And they even call it "web exhibitions" too...

BL: *Exactly. And no one would have to experience the objects first hand in order to get the same experience out of it. So I don't in anyway want to suggest that websites are the same as museums or something like that. I don't really believe that it's more just to say that other kinds of things can be museum-like - or they can have the same function as museums without being a physical museum.*

I think sometimes this actually happens in museums... I can't really think of examples at the moment... I might come up with some later on.

JN: But the web example was very good actually because it is a very direct form of interaction; the visitor is sitting in front of a computer.

BL: *Yes. Well, it's not like I want to find a museum that's just about concepts. But the point is that even if there are objects; what makes this a museum? It's not just the objects because you have other kinds of exhibiting places that also have objects but they are not museums and don't have that interpretive function.*

There are other kinds of exhibiting functions... you get things like the Millennium Dome where you have lots of things on display and they have a sort of educational purpose but it's not a museum because the interpretation isn't there.

JN: I would like to ask you: Many museums seem to be broadening their visitor interaction by using new technologies or virtual approaches in their exhibitions. Do you think that is something that can either encourage or interrupt philosophical thinking in museums?

BL: *I think it encourages it. I mean, I'm not against that kind of thing at all. Obviously it depends on the technology, the exhibition and how it's written; it's all about the quality of what is being produced. So interpretation can take many different forms. It can also be a person talking it doesn't have to be text on the wall. It can be something interactive, it can be web-based, it can be audio. There are lots of different ways of doing it... I think, new technology definitely enhance it. And what's coming in now is that you get very personalized interpretations of people. An example; I was recently at the Natural History Museum at the new Darwin Centre and they have these little cards you go around and you can scan in the exhibits and find things you are interested in -*

and then go home and put it on your computer. It is a personalized sort of web-experience.

JN: So you can actually continue the experience at home...

BL: *Yeah, that's right. Many museums also have things where you can go around and capture bits of audio and bits of stuff from the exhibition so you can kind of personalize the meaning and interpretation which I also think is really interesting. So it's definitely shifting things away from the galleries and telling you how to take stories away with you.*

JN: It's not just a one-way communication anymore at museums?

BL: *No. I think it's very interesting...*

JN: I think that might actually be something that can encourage philosophy as well. It certainly doesn't disable philosophical thinking in the museum in any way.

BL: *Yes, it can certainly encourage people to bring deeper ideas to what it is they are seeing. Usually interpretation in museums doesn't usually go to that deep a level and that's probably fine - you can't ask too much of people. But I'm always drawn to exhibitions that make their exhibition nature thematic; The Enlightenment Gallery in the British Museum, for instance, is one of my favourite examples: It's an exhibition about exhibiting and it makes you really think about what it is. Actually, this museum (The McManus Galleries) has a little section on "What is a Museum?". It's a sort of version of the same thing. And lots of museums now do this as an introductory way to museums.*

JN: I guess, also simply to say: "This is what we do"?

BL: *Yeah, that's right. There's also a nice little interactive game here where you can choose an object and choose how to see it.*

JN: Yeah, that was really interesting. Also to see how people interacted with that and got involved.

BL: *Yes, that's really nice.*

JN: I would like to move on to Foucault and his definition of the museum as a heterotopia. I must say, I really enjoyed your article where you discuss his definition - and I keep finding new perspectives on his approach. He defines the museum as a space of difference and he argues that museums are actually capable of performing critique of their own development, relevance and purpose - of their own use even. What's really interesting is that he states that this is **because** of their roots in Enlightenment – and not **in spite** of it. I was wondering; do you think museums should embrace possibilities of questioning their own use? Can they perform such a critique?

BL: *Absolutely. I think, in these kinds of self-reflective moments, museums have that already really. When museums are thinking about “What is a museum?” and is not just looking at how do museum curators deal with objects but actually deals with what is the purpose and function of museums: “Why do we have museums at all? What could museums become in the future?”.*

I suppose, in that article on Foucault, I was trying to get at the notion that museums have always been Enlightenment institutions and therefore already internalize that kind of question fundamental to the Enlightenment. One of the questions is the ability to critique one’s own roots. Even if a museum doesn’t have a self-reflective moment that question is still in it as an institution of interpretation. And thinking about how we connect concepts and objects together. There’s always the possibility that those can be connected differently or not at all. So I think that potentiality it’s always there even at the most traditional, boring museums I think it’s always there.

JN: It just struck me a bit because it seems to be something museums in general are very reluctant to do. Especially to embrace change is something they are notoriously reluctant to do. But embracing the concept of critique is also in a way to embrace change; so you are welcoming people to ask questions, I guess?

BL: *I think that’s changing a lot. In the past 10-20 years we have seen a real shift probably from people studying museum studies or becoming more theoretically aware of these kinds of things. People who come in to work in museums now are much more open to that kind of thing. It is not true of everywhere obviously.*

If we look at my other favourite example, Kelvingrove; the way that has transformed itself into an institution that’s very open and very open to change. The new layout was designed in order to incorporate change because they decided that an exhibition should have a time limit of about 25 years. We don’t want to reinvent museums every 25 years so what they did was to built the potentiality for change into all of the different rooms and all the different cases and so on. So they could be refreshed fairly often. It’s an interesting approach to it; it’s about allowing objects to adapt.

JN: I think museums really do have problems with the term permanent or permanent exhibitions. There’s not any change incorporated in that term at all...

In your article you also mention that the concept of heterotopias is particularly significant because it has the potential to shift the definition of the museum away from objects and collections and towards difference. Do you think museums fully understand what difference might hold as a concept?

BL: *No! Probably not... In a sense that’s the privilege of the theoretician or the philosopher to think about those things. I don’t pretend that people who are working in museums deeply engage with these kinds of issues. I think certainly museum staff is engage with difference in that they are coming to understand differences in audiences*

and that people have different kinds of experiences. So difference in that sense. But that kind of notice of difference... no! And I don't think it's necessary.

JN: But it is fascinating because they do have the potential to be very different from all other institutions - and to be experimental...

BL: *That's right, but that's why they continue to change. That's why they continue to find ways to tell the same old story really. If you think about the difference between a museum and a symphony orchestra; Symphony orchestras interpret the music but are basically doing the same thing that was done 300 years ago in terms of presenting the score - whereas museums have the same raw ingredients but are able to be very varied. So sometimes these kinds of notions are deeply engraved in our consciousness.*

JN: Finally, I would like to ask about museums and the future: How do you see museums and philosophical thinking develop in the future? Do you think there will be more research on the subjects?

BL: *I don't know... there's a lot of interest in curatorship, I think, maybe coming more from art history and art theories. And given that curatorship is sort of about the choices that people in museums and art galleries make in terms of objects - that seems to be something that has some credence at the moment. Maybe there is some sort of philosophy in that... I don't know really.*

I am interested in whether we will get any museum exhibitions about philosophy - and more about philosophical ideas and objects. You get it sometimes to some extent; sometimes you get really creative exhibitions - even put on by places like The British Museum where they will look at how a certain idea operate in different cultures. For example comparing different cultures - or how different cultures approach the same issues. That could end up being quite interesting because usually exhibitions don't compare in this way. So you do see new sets of ideas.

JN: It seems like museums can be encouraged to be more open towards new visitor groups or community groups by being more open to philosophical thinking. Do you think that is something we will see in museum in the future?

BL: *I guess so. A trend that actually worries me a bit that has been seen during the last few years is a trend to move away from interpretation in the galleries. You get galleries now that are highly aesthetic; they are all about the beautiful arrangement of objects. They are deliberately moving away from proving texture and interpretation and so on. They have good motives in doing that because they want people to just have an experience of the objects. I find it quite problematic because it sort of turn the museum into a place of just beautiful objects rather than a place of interpretation. Sometimes in the name of greater diversity or in the name of greater access museums might actually be preventing interpretation from happening because they say: "We don't want to impose a curatorial voice - we just want people to come and make whatever connection*

they make". Then the problem is that people don't make any connection, they don't know what they are supposed to do.

That seems to be happening a lot now. I kind of understand why because it is a very beautiful way of dealing with lots of stuff but...

JN: Yeah, it can leave visitors confused...

BL: *It can, I think. Of course in art galleries that has been the case forever. Usually there is no interpretation at all or very little. And that is still more or less the case in many places. You do get some visitor interpretation in some visitor friendly places now.*

JN: Thank you so much for some interesting perspectives and for your time.

Appendix 2.2:

Conversation with Dr Donald Smith, Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh

- 7th February 2013:

Transcribed by Jane Nielsen, February 2013

DS: Donald Smith

JN: Jane Nielsen

JN: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet up. I was really fascinated by your speech at the Museums Association Conference in November last year. You summed up the discussions and debates very well at the end of the conference - and I would very much like to start with some of your points from that talk, if I may?

DS: *I tried to collect and create a framework - it was a really interesting thing to do. I thought it was a very interesting model of a conference. I thought the venue was quite good - but also because everybody was there from the museum world. It really was a gather of so many people.*

JN: You summed up brilliantly everything that had been discussed during the conference although there were so many different themes and perspectives on the table. It seems so obvious that stories have always been part of what museums do and part of their communication - and yet, it doesn't seem as if many museums intentionally approach storytelling as an essential part of their learning concepts. When you go to visit a museum do you see that?

DS: *Yes. I suppose the power of storytelling in the way that we think and interpret things is so pervasive that at times people feel very unconscious about it. And in a way you can understand that because it forms so much of the communication that sometimes people find it so hard to step back and say: "Okay, so what kind of narrative, what kind of storytelling are we doing?". There are two things here; there's narrative as a structure and a way of thinking and there's storytelling as a way or ways of communicating.*

JN: Is that something you think museums can learn from storytelling - to develop both their communication but also their narrative and their language?

DS: *Yeah - absolutely! It is very interesting, you see, because it's not even just about language but verbal language - everything serves a narrative: Visual design, the shape of an exhibition, the ordering of an exhibition. All these things, whether it's a permanent display or a temporary exhibition - all these things actually have an implied narrative. People connect consciously, unconsciously, half-consciously to these applied narratives. It's everything from visual to verbal wording and structure. I think things are changing and that is very healthy; you see, I think that for a long time academic analysis led the curatorial and therefore exhibitions were driven by a certain form of curatorial expertise. I'm not knocking the academic - at the conference I spoke very strongly in favour of objects - but I think there was a gap between... or academic intellectualised analyses that led the way things were interpreted - whereas the majority of people don't operate on that kind of thinking. That's not to be in anyway patronising or to say that the majority of people were more right than the academics.*

JN: Museums often get some critique about that because they don't concentrate on making their collections "speak" to the broad range of visitors.

DS: *Yes - that is an interesting thing. Stories are very inclusive in terms of ways we receive things at different age ranges, different kinds of sensory abilities, different kinds of learning styles - all of that. I think that is happening, you see - I think there's a lot of change. I'm not in any way arguing against curating or against the research...*

JN: Do you think storytelling can somehow help museum visitors engage more in exhibitions - or perhaps make them share their own stories?

DS: *Yeah, there is all that as well. That is an interesting aspect of what we learn from storytelling; the social experience. Traditionally, it is two-way communication. Traditionally, you tell a story to be given a story back. So that is very interesting. At the Museums Association Conference that was slightly puffed up as being sort of theatre or to see the exhibitions as performers - but for me it was more about the exhibition as participation because it was about involving people in the experience.*

JN: Yes, there is a huge difference.

DS: *Yes, and involving the staff as well. I loved that discussion at the conference; the exhibition is not finished when it opens - it's finished when it closes!*

JN: Yes, because it used to be like that: When an exhibition opened that was when the curators believed their job to be done.

DS: *Yes, sort of: "I have done it. There it is! Make of it what you will". But there's layers here which is to do with narratives in exhibition presentations. And then there's another layer about how those narratives interact with the audience. So there are two layers. Storytelling lies in everything but is very strong in the second layer about how people experience interpretation. I think also the narrative in the first layer is strong.*

An example: Have you seen the Viking exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland?
(Note: The exhibition *Vikings! The untold Story* was displayed at The National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh from 18th January - 12th May 2013).

JN: Yes.

DS: *Now, you see... I think that is quite a well designed exhibition - some interesting stuff going on in there - I liked the bits where you were in a sense being invited to experience the artefacts. The most successful was the ship where you just get the ribbons of the design (Note: Part of the exhibition featured a so-called “ghost” Viking ship showing the bottom of the boat structure and created with its original iron nails connected by fishing line to show the design and building structure). It’s really interesting; one of my sons is working there in visitor services and they have all been instructed that there should be somebody beside the ship all the time because people might steal the ribbons - because it’s so interactive. And people want to touch and bring it with them...*

JN: Really?! It is actually a very inviting part of the exhibition...

DS: *Yes, and also there were other bits of it that implied good narrative structure. Like the circular bits where you were being invited to explore the mythology and the gods and those things. Also, the way it was physically organised; the structure. Now, you clearly see how alongside that there’s another whole layer of live creative engagement.*

JN: To return to what you said about layers; because you have the language, the narratives and the communication but I guess it is also very much about how we organise and motivate communication? Is that a very different layer?

DS: *I suppose it also depends of what opportunities, what contexts you are going to find. Just to use the Viking exhibition as an example they have tried many things in the narrative and structure and fixed interpretation. It is quite well thought through.*

JN: Yes, there’s a lot of information - it is quite compact.

DS: *Yes, and it uses the artefacts really well. It doesn’t overload or drown anything out. However, it is not hugely family friendly, I think. It is quite heavy weight. So there’s room for thinking about what can we do for other groups and use the material to interact and built activities that use the stories that’s there.*

JN: I also noticed that here at the Scottish Storytelling Centre you have a varied range of development and training options for organisations. Would that be something that could also apply to museum curators or managers - because I’m guessing that kind of communication has to start internally within an organisation?

DS: *There is a funny thing about that which is quite interesting: The curators tend not to come to those courses. The education people come! Often guides as well.*

JN: Yes, front of house staff.

DS: *Yes, that's interesting and comes back to this hierarchy that exists in museums. They say: "We have the knowledge - we are the priesthood. And you "mortals" can go out and communicate it to the lesser known".*

JN: Yes, it seems to be a difficult barrier to break down at museums...

DS: *Yes, I know. But narrative does break it down because it is a "shared currency" - we are all part of it. But there are skills around live interaction, thinking about the story and communicating the story that is very very interesting - they are about self presentation and communication and all the rest of it. They are universal but often go unexamined or un-reflected on because it's thought of as being simple to tell a story. But it is not! There are so many complex things involved in it. It is very interesting that there are skills about editing, focusing, aiming communication that are hugely relevant to the design level of museum interpretation as well as the delivery, you know?*

It's about changing aspects: For example, I can remember being commissioned to write audio scripts for a major heritage location that wouldn't allow the use of Scottish language in those scripts. And in the end I refused to do it. But that is an example of an organisation that has taken one step which was: "Yes, let's involve audio drama"... but that was too gutsy - in those times perhaps also seen as a bit too political. What was bizarre was that if you looked at the visitors - they had those same social and cultural distinctions that the organisation was excluding. And I tried to connect the stories to the experiences that people knew now instead. It was one of those works that just couldn't be combined, you know.

I think things have changed... Now, where did you say you were from originally?

JN: I'm from Denmark.

DS: *Oh yes - there's a great love of dressing up and engaging...*

JN: Yes, living history, as it is called.

DS: *Yes, that's right. That's really interesting.*

JN: So, do you think storytelling can act as an agent for change? Is it possible for museums to change their communication or focus their communication differently through stories?

DS: *Yes yes - of course it can. But there's an interesting question there: Who are the storytellers? Whose stories are you telling? There is a power-thing about storytelling. You cannot simply say that storytelling can be an agent for change - the more people have gradually become aware of the power and the way stories work the more you get powerful institutions that are prepared to invest money in storytelling. This is why the*

full tradition of storytelling is very interesting because there's the thing about who owns the story and in a way everybody owns the story, you see? I think a storytelling approach can change things because it raises these questions; what kind of story are we telling? Whose story is it? Who owns this story? And who are we telling it for? On what basis are we telling it?

It is interesting when you work with doctors or teachers or clergies because they are storytellers. They are dealing with narratives day in and day out - and communicating with people every day. But in actual storytelling as the old art you stop being the teacher! You stop being the Reverent. So when you tell a story you expect a story back. And what you tell me is as important as what I tell you. This is why I think stories are so powerful, this live engagement; I started to share the story but my way of telling it is going to be "swayed" by your reaction and what you feel about that story. And I need to know what you feel because storytelling shared is in all our minds and imaginations. That is so fascinating - you have to get off your pedestal.

I see that in museums as places of culture and interpretation and education and all the things that they are - the artefacts, the expertise, and the research - alongside that.... Quite a long time ago the Carnegie Trust did a fantastic report on museum education called "Curiosity, learning and imagination". That's it for me! That's what storytelling does in museums. It promotes, it engages with people around a shared exercise in curiosity, learning and imagination. So the storytelling bit is about our engagement and whatever different meanings and what is our curiosity?

JN: But if you tell a story and expect me to engage doesn't that require a very specific emotional engagement before people actually want to become engaged?

DS: *Well, the word for it: It requires "permission"! It requires the sense that you are invited to be part of it. You are at the party! So it's important to feel that the exhibition is interested to hear what you have to say about it. To say: I would like to find out what you think about the story of this exhibition and how you might express your feelings about it. So suddenly it becomes a learning community. We all want to grow in our imagination and self-confidence and so on in a learning community. So I see a museum in that same framework. Not an academy of specialists - it might have some of those functions depending on the collections - but I think it is equally important how it is a learning community. How does it create a learning community?*

JN: Do you think museums are actually doing that? Are they taking steps towards that?

DS: *I think a lot of them are trying. What you have to remember here is I have worked at a lot of small local museums as well as big national institutions - sometimes the small local museums do this better than the bigger institutions. If I looked at storytellers or storytelling years ago, whether it was teachers or community actors or people who were emerging as professional storytellers, like interpreters - the concept that the museum is*

about is fantastically right for all these people and their skills. To bring these two things together is something we really must do!

I also think the big change from The National Museum as it was to The National Museum in its new design... they were trying to see who is this story for...

JN: Yes, there is definitely a strong focus on learning, I think...

DS: *Yeah yeah, and there was a strong debate behind that. We were involved - not in a critical way, but in a supportive way.*

There's another interesting layer about that: The design in curating and the narrative structure. You've got engagement through storytelling, a learning community that all influence these resources. People from the community of learning are becoming co-curators perhaps.

It is also interesting to dwell on the tangible and cultural heritage. An interesting concept that also has its own pitfalls: The museum to a degree is about the tangible whereas the intangible is interesting. If you take the community of learning, the different groups and connections, they are partly already united with the museum in the tangible and cultural concept in a wider sense. I'm talking quite wide here... You can see in both local and national museums that this sort of dynamic of the intangible cultural heritage and how that links to the museum institution and the community is hugely powerful. In small local museums you often see a culture that has for centuries been shaped by this particular work or industry - and you can create some fantastic small projects that involve people if the artefacts connect with the intangible heritage. You begin to see these kinds of feedbacks where what you do in curating and objects meet the community of learning which feeds the intangible culture of learning.

JN: Perhaps some smaller museums are a bit better at opening up to those kinds of narratives than the bigger ones?

DS: *Quite possibly. The reason for that is very pragmatic; to survive. They need the community so this is a natural way to engage. It's not quite enough to focus on a narrow specific expertise subject - people are not going to come. People are not going to think that this museum is for us then. I'm not knocking smaller historic expertise topics but it has to work with some other stuff as well. Then more people might be already there and perhaps they will then engage in expert knowledge and appreciate it as well.*

JN: Can I jump to another aspect that might influence storytelling as well: You mentioned traditional storytelling and how it becomes more and more popular. Yet, museums are also very much trying to embrace the digital age. Is it easier or more difficult to embrace storytelling through technology? Is it possible to embrace both?

DS: *Well - yes, it is. There's good storytelling behind digital media. You also have the social media which also allows for participation. However, there's still a place for the live engagement. People still need to be people - still need to be social.*

When the modern storytelling began, late 60ies into the 70ies probably, it differs in different cultures around the world. Back then there was a slight romantic tendency and environmental edge to technology. However, I think the desire to tell live along with increasing use of the digital go together - the reason for that is totally understandable and logical. We have a fantastic range of digital resources now, we can manipulate and present and so on, but actually that makes people realise more how special and important it is to be live. To have the real context...

JN: So it sort of creates a need of live storytelling...?

DS: *Yeah, it does. And it creates an understanding where people are beginning to see what's special about that. That's really interesting. Many young people's language skills do not develop because they speak less to each other. So actually it's quite compelling to speak and interact directly with people. I think museums should remember that! It is interesting that you can be very high tech - though I think you get a bit bored by it at the National Museum... we had storytellers there at the opening. It was an extraordinary difficult environment to speak to anybody in. There are lots of buttons for people to push but the actually space to engage in is difficult...*

I think there is a lesson in that: Yes, we should have all the technology but people love to speak, they love to talk to somebody...

JN: Yes, just to be heard is important to everyone.

DS: *Yes, to have a conversation. And you want to see why I am interested in this, you know. At the end of the day, it's not quite the same to engage via e.g. a vox pop. There are all sorts of interesting possibilities where museums do realise that they are using it all - but it has to overlap with the community of learning. I think, they are trying to engage in these things - they are. Though sometimes it is quite difficult because you don't have the resources - and there are other pressures. Yet, sometimes you can do these things without many resources.*

JN: If I may return to you point at the Museums Association Conference: You ended you talk there with a brilliant quote, I think. You said: "Don't let the band stop playing because we are all enjoying the music!". I think that was a fantastic way to sum up the discussions.

DS: *You see, what my point with that was: Sometimes people feel that they are under so much pressure to change. They forget that lots of people are going to museums and love them! That is really important - and that people love the objects and they love the exhibitions. It is kind of like saying to people: Don't be involved in a cult where*

EVERYTHING must change. I blame Tony Blair personally for that... in my view, this is a worldwide capitalist plot to undermine all our social bonds. Why must everything change if it works? Sometimes you have to stop and say: "Well, just a minute, just a minute... Yes, we have to innovate and involve - but there are certain constants here. And those are cultural values!". I think that is where it becomes very personal - museums are fantastically important places. They are carrying real civilisation values. So whatever one does - you don't want to ditch the baby with the bath water.

JN: I think it is also a good point that you can develop without changing fundamentally. You can still develop without changing everything.

DS: *Exactly! Not everything is wrong. In general, most things are right, you see. And that was another message I was trying to make: There are different pressures around the world but in the UK I think that people have done so much good work. So it's also about saying that we have done all that; we have done new things, we have become more socially engaged, we have reached out in different ways. There comes a time when you have to say: "Okay, this thing is really valuable". We have a right to say this because governments, philanthropists, the public support us - because this is something good!*

The way that politics work in the UK from the 90ies has been that everything must be continuously reformed and restructured and more business-focused. The bizarre thing about that is that all that led to an enormous economic collapse. People got so obsessed with these processes that cultural value and social purposes went out the window. Some people did not learn that lesson and think we need more restructuring, but surely not! Museums, at the end of the day, represents cultural, social, educational and economical value that stand in their own right. From a sound valued base... In the cultural, political, economical world we are in, museums are centres of cultural understanding and people are communicating cultural understanding across boundaries, race and religion which is so important.

JN: Do you think we will see that more and more in the future at museums?

DS: *I think it is about setting a purpose! What is our purpose?*

JN: So finding a focus?

DS: *Yes, you know - the curiosity, the imagination and the knowledge base that is represented is there. But what is it we need to do now? That is the most vital thing. Somehow bizarrely becoming a smaller world sometimes seem to be leading to more prejudice and competition and rivalry and stereotyping of other cultures - that is odd, isn't it? So what is the role of museums in connection with that? To address it all!*

JN: What do you think it would require defining that purpose? Will it require something special in the future for museums to find that focus? Perhaps a specific expertise?

DS: *No, it's part of telling the story about why we are here, about who we are and what we are trying to do as a museum and as museums together.*

JN: So it is very basic?

DS: *It is! Sometimes the most basic things are the most obvious and the ones we forget how to articulate. It takes me back to why stories are so pervasive without people realise how important they are. These values are so critical and essential but we have to keep articulating them. Yes, it can be great that others are contributing money to a specific exhibition or event but that is not actual the main purpose - we have to keep reminding people of that and why it matters, you know?*

JN: I guess, one thing is to make museum visitors interact with for example exhibitions but do you think we will also see visitors interact more with each other in the future?

DS: *Absolutely! That goes back to the community of learning. That can only enrich everybody's sense of the importance of the setting, the value of the collection, the value of this place. That goes back again to museum layers in design: You can look at any museum and say: "Okay, so where do people gather in this place? What's the sociability? Where are people going to talk?"*

It is very interesting. If you for example walk into the Portrait Gallery here - it's got it! It has always had it. It is something about the central hall, the cafe and so on that is inviting. I think The National Museum at Chambers Street struggles a bit. Someone made a reference to the goldfish at the old museum at the ground floor. It was the most popular attraction... I was in there often when my kids were small... but then they found out that 90-something percent of the visitors never got beyond the goldfish. So that was a bit shocking. So they got rid of the goldfish. But you see... maybe that wasn't the correct lesson of that. Perhaps it was better to say: "Why is it that people are gathering - is it just about goldfish? Or is there something else happening?"

So it comes back to how physically inviting the museum is; where is the space for learning? Where is the space for the people to interact? Or is it all about visitor flow? These are all interesting questions for the design in an exhibition or in whatever.

JN: I think museums should probably think more about that than they do...

DS: *Yes, I think they should.*

JN: Thank you so much!

Appendix 2.3:

Questions debated via email correspondence with Caroline Rand, Head of Financial Planning & Analysis, Historic Royal Palaces.

April and May 2013:

1) To which areas of work at HRP has Trajectory Partnership contributed and what kind of model or methods do they use in this work?

Trajectory helps us once a year to build visitor projections (numbers and income). They cover five year (remaining of current year (circa one quarter), next year's budget and another 3 years. This is to support our annual operating plan and strategic plan process. They only cover our three main palaces (the Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace) as the other two palaces are not material in terms of visitor numbers and a lot easier to predict.

They work with us over a 4-month period roughly (October-January).

Their modelling is based on a statistical analysis of the historical behaviour of HRP business

Their model takes into the following factors to come up with projections:

- *Global economic performance*
- *Exchange rates*
- *Admission prices*
- *Expenditure by foreign visitors*
- *UK economic performance, especially real income growth, inflation, leisure spend*
- *Other factors (Sept 11, marketing activity, etc.)*

All factors are weighted and the weighting of the different factors is reviewed every year.

It is important to know that they do not take into account HRP internal activity, e.g. special exhibitions, public programming, etc for which we may add separate overlays subsequently.

2) What sort of advantages do you think they make for strategic plan projections at HRP?

An independent unbiased view with a more robust modelling tool to substantiate a very important part of our planning process.

A much better understanding and knowledge of the external conditions which we don't necessarily have the skills and bandwidth to explore in the way they do.

3) Are there any disadvantages or challenges of using this kind of forecasting in your work?

Defining the separate overlays is not straightforward.

They cannot predict the weather which has a material impact on some of our palaces and the one-off events (bombing, pandemic, etc) which can happen and have a devastating bearing on visitors and overall performance.

A chunk of money for the service!

4) For how long has HRP been working with Trajectory Partnership?

Not 100% sure but at least 5 years, might be close to 8 now

5) Do you think HRP will keep using these kind of forecasting perspectives or methods of future thinking in years to come?

Yes definitely.

I have only been in HRP for a year so I haven't got huge experience of their work but there seems to be respect and appreciation of their contribution from the main directors involved.

Interestingly I heard in a recent ALVA (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions) forum that they are thinking about pairing up with Trajectory to offer a visitor projection service to other attractions.

Questions debated via email correspondence with Chris Farmelo, Non-Executive Director, Trajectory Partnership.

May 2013:

1) To which areas of work at HRP has Trajectory contributed and what kind of models or methods do you use?

We have constructed a series of forecasting models to predict visitor numbers and revenues for the Tower of London, Hampton Court and Kensington Palace. These forecasts extend out for five years. We rely quite heavily, but not entirely, on econometric modelling techniques.

2) What sort of advantages do you think this work provides for an organization like HRP?

It provides them with a better understanding of both the key drivers causing visitor numbers to go up and down over time and a structured framework to produce numerical forecasts as an input into their budgeting processes.

3) Are there any disadvantages or challenges involved when working with future perspectives or foresights at institutions that are mainly used to working with the past?

Econometric modelling does have a number of shortcomings and it is important that the output from the forecasting models are used alongside other intelligence about the likely development of the particular visitor attraction we are working with. The outputs should not be used in isolation of other intelligence.

4) For how long has Trajectory been working with HRP?

For around ten years

5) Do you think it will become more usual for museums in the future to work with foresight companies about specific parts of their work? If so, which areas of museum or heritage work do you think will benefit the most?

Yes, there is an increasing amount of interest in 'futures' issues amongst museums and we are doing an increasing amount of work in the area. This ranges from the more quantitative and technical forecasting to more qualitative 'trends' analysis.

6) (Additional question based on Caroline Rand's response to question 5): It seems that ALVA (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions) would like to offer museums and other attractions a visitor projection service in partnership with Trajectory? This sound like a really interesting initiative: Can you say a bit about how this is developing or what form this work will take?

This is in very early stages at the moment. Clearly HRP have got a lot of benefit out of the work we have been doing for them and we thought that it would be a good idea to suggest a more general forecasting service to all large visitor attractions, specifically forecasting visitor numbers to their specific attractions. We have so far had one meeting with ALVA and think if something does happen it is likely to be next year sometime.

Appendix 3: Ethical Approval Form

MUSEUM COMMUNICATION: LEARNING, INTERACTION AND EXPERIENCE

I am pleased to inform you that your ethical application in respect of the above project has been considered by the School Ethics Committee. The following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Application Form
2. Participant Information Sheet
3. Sample Questionnaire

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for completion within the stated time period (Jan 2012 – Sept 2014). Projects, which have not commenced within the time given must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice' (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%2008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

(Professor Ian Carradice)

Convenor of the School Ethics Committee

Dawn Waddell

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